

ACME

Fall No. 2

STARTLING MYSTERY

STORIES 50c

UNUSUAL - EERIE - STRANGE

Jules de Grandin

in

THE HOUSE OF HORROR

by

SEABURY QUINN

•

THE MEN IN BLACK

by

JOHN BRUNNER

•

Simon Ark

in

THE WITCH IS DEAD

by

EDWARD D. HOCH

•

TERRY CARR
TED WHITE



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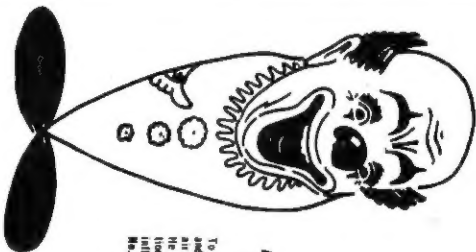
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STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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Introduction

THE ENTHUSIASM with which you, the readers, greeted the first issue of **STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES** — and your letters are still coming in as we type this at the end of June — leaves little doubt that you approve our general policy of offering you a wide variety of unusual, eerie, and strange mystery tales, old and new, both those with a so-called “natural” and those with a so-called “supernatural” base. As we replied to one happy reader, we shall try at least as hard as *Avis*, to mix them up in each issue so that you won’t be able to be sure (at least, not every time) just which sort of story you are reading when you start one.

We have arranged with Seabury Quinn to present more of the adventures of Drs. Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge to you. Ten of the tales appear in a new hard-cover collection (see *Books* in this issue) and are off-limits to us; but we have free range among the other 80-odd. These stories nearly all take place in the 20’s or 30’s and we have made no effort to update them — only to indicate the decade.

Your response was more mixed on the first Simon Ark story; enough of you were pleased, however, to justify a return engagement. So we’ve brought him back and you tell us how he looks to you this time. Meanwhile, let’s look over our present lineup:

— What was the connection between the eyes of a drugged girl, a suicide and disappearance thirty years in the past, and the attempt to destroy Dr. Trowbridge’s car on a rainy night? De Grandin and Trowbridge find the answers in *The House of Horror*.

• Have you ever had a dream that was utterly fantastic and yet disturbingly real in its seeming — even after you awoke? Well, we hope it did not reach the bizarre depths to be found in *The Strange Case of Pascall*

— To change the pace, a lighter touch does not mean a less interesting riddle in the commonplace; it led one man to *The Secret of the City*.

— Had the bitter old woman who called herself Madame Fortune really put a workable spell of black magic upon the school that had once expelled her? Why were the girls all developing a sickness that baffled the school physician? And why couldn’t the riddle be solved until Simon Ark announced, *The Witch is Dead?*

(Turn to page 128)

The House Of Horror

by Seabury Quinn

(author of *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*)

"MORBLEU, Friend Trowbridge, have a care," Jules de Grandin warned as my lurching motor car almost ran into the brimming ditch beside the rain-soaked road.

I wrenched the steering wheel viciously and swore softly under my breath as I leaned forward, striving vainly to pierce the curtains of rain which shut us in.

"No use, old fellow," I conceded, turning to my companion, "we're lost; that's all there is to it."

"Ha," he laughed shortly, "do you just begin to discover that fact, my friend? *Parbleu*, I have known it this last half-hour."

Throttling my engine down, I crept along the concrete roadway, peering through my streaming windshield and storm cur-

A mansion like a fortress . . . and in the cellar, the doctor's "pets" . . .

tains for some familiar landmark, but nothing but blackness, wet and impenetrable, met my eyes.

Two hours before, that stormy evening in 192-, answering an insistent 'phone call, de Grandin and I had left the security of my warm office to administer a dose of toxin anti-toxin to an Italian laborer's child who lay, choking with diphtheria, in a hut at the workmen's settlement where the new branch of the railroad was being put through. The cold, driving rain and the Stygian darkness of the night had misled me when I made the detour around the railway cut, and for the past hour and a half I had been feeling my way over unfamiliar roads as futilely as a lost child wandering in the woods.

"*Grace a Dieu*," de Grandin exclaimed, seizing my arm with both his small, strong hands, "a light! See, there it shines in the night. Come, let us go to it. Even the meanest hovel is preferable to this so villainous rain."

I peeped through a joint in the curtains and saw a faint, intermittent light flickering through the driving rain some two hundred yards away.

"All right," I acquiesced, climbing from the car, "we've lost so much time already we probably couldn't do anything for the Vivianti child, and maybe these people can put us on the right road, anyway."

Plunging through puddles like miniature lakes, soaked by the wind-driven rain, barking our shins again and again on invisible obstacles, we made for the light, finally drawing up to a large, square house of red brick fronted by an imposing white-pillared porch. Light streamed out through the fanlight over the white door and from the two tall windows flanking the portal.

"*Parbleu*, a house of circumstance, this," de Grandin commented, mounting the porch and banging lustily at the polished brass knocker.

I wrinkled my forehead in thought while he rattled the knocker a second time. "Strange, I can't remember this place," I muttered. "I thought I knew every building within thirty miles, but this is a new one . . ."

"Ah bahl" de Grandin interrupted. "Always you must be casting a wet blanket on the parade, Friend Trowbridge. First you insist on losing us in the midst of a *sacre* rainstorm, then when I, Jules de Grandin, find us a shelter from the weather, you must needs waste time in wondering why it is you know not the place. *Morbleu*, you will refuse shelter because you have never been presented to the master of the house, if I do not watch you, I fear."

"But I ought to know the place, de Grandin," I protested.

"It's certainly imposing enough to . . ."

My defense was cut short by the sharp click of a lock, and the wide, white door swung inward before us.

We strode over the threshold, removing our dripping hats as we did so, and turned to address the person who opened the door.

"Why . . ." I began, and stared about me in open-mouthed surprise.

"Name of a little blue man!" said Jules de Grandin, and added his incredulous stare to mine.

AS FAR AS we could see, we were alone in the mansion's imposing hall. Straight before us, perhaps for forty feet, ran a corridor of parquet flooring, covered here and there by rich-hued Oriental rugs. White-paneled walls, adorned with oil paintings of imposing-looking individuals, rose for eighteen feet or so to a beautifully frescoed ceiling, and a graceful curving staircase swept upward from the farther end of the room. Candles in cut glass sconces lighted the high-ceiled apartment, the hospitable glow from a log fire burning under the high white marble mantel lent an air of homely coziness to the place, but of anything living, human or animal, there was no faintest trace or sign.

Click! Behind us, the heavy

outer door swung to silently on well-oiled hinges and the automatic lock latched firmly.

"Death of my life!" de Grandin murmured, reaching for the door's silver-plated knob and giving it a vigorous twist. "*Par la moustache du diable*, Friend Trowbridge, it is locked! Truly, perhaps it had been better if we had remained outside in the rain!"

"Not at all, I assure you, my dear sir," a rich, mellow voice answered him from the curve of the stairs. "Your arrival was nothing less than providential, gentlemen."

Coming toward us, walking heavily with the aid of a stout cane, was an unusually handsome man attired in pajamas and dressing gown, a sort of nightcap of flowered silk on his white head, slippers of softest Morocco on his feet.

"You are a physician, sir?" he asked, glancing inquiringly at the medicine case in my hand.

"Yes," I answered. "I am Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, from Harrisonville, and this is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of Paris, who is my guest."

"Ah," replied our host, "I am very, very glad to welcome you to Marston Hall, gentlemen. It so happens that one — er — my daughter, is quite ill, and I have been unable to obtain medical aid for her on account of my infirmities and the lack of a telephone. If I may trespass on

your charity to attend my poor child, I shall be delighted to have you as my guests for the night. If you will lay aside your coats" — he paused expectantly. "Ah, thank you" — as we hung our dripping garments over a chair — "you will come this way, please?"

We followed him up the broad stairs and down an upper corridor to a tastefully furnished chamber where a young girl — fifteen years of age, perhaps — lay propped up with a pile of diminutive pillows.

"Anabel, Anabel, my love, here are two doctors to see you," the old gentleman called softly.

The girl moved her fair head with a weary, peevish motion and whimpered softly in her sleep, but gave no further recognition of our presence.

"And what have been her symptoms, if you please, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked as he rolled back the cuffs of his jacket and prepared to make an examination.

"Sleep," replied our host, "just sleep. Some time ago she suffered from influenza; lately she has been given to fits of protracted slumber from which I can not waken her. I fear she may have contracted sleeping sickness, sir. I am told it sometimes follows influenza."

"H'm." De Grandin passed his small, pliable hands rapidly over the girl's cheeks in the re-

gion of the ears, felt rapidly along her neck over the jugular vein, then raised a puzzled glance to me. "Have you some laudanum and aconite in your bag, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked.

"There's some morphine," I answered, "and aconite; but no laudanum."

"No matter," he waved his hand impatiently, bustling over to the medicine case and extracting two small phials from it. "No matter, this will do as well. Some water, if you please, *Monsieur*," he turned to the father, a medicine bottle in each hand.

"But, de Grandin" — I began, when a sudden kick from one of his slender, heavily-shod feet nearly broke my shin — "de Grandin, do you think that's the proper medication?" I finished lamely.

"Oh, *mais oui*, undoubtedly," he replied. "Nothing else would do in this case. Water, if you please, *Monsieur*," he repeated, again addressing the father.

I STARED at him in ill-disguised amazement as he extracted a pellet from each of the bottles and quickly ground them to powder while the old gentleman filled a tumbler with water from the porcelain pitcher which stood on the chintz-draped wash-stand in the corner of the chamber. He was as familiar

with the arrangement of my medicine case as I was, I knew, and knew that my phials were arranged by numbers instead of being labeled. Deliberately, I saw, he had passed over the morphine and aconite, and had chosen two bottles of plain, unmedicated sugar of milk pills. What his object was I had no idea, but I watched him measure out four teaspoonfuls of water, dissolve the powder in it, and pour the sham medication down the unconscious girl's throat.

"Good," he proclaimed as he washed the glass with meticulous care. "She will rest easily until the morning, *Monsieur*. When daylight comes we shall decide on further treatment. Will you now permit that we retire?" He bowed politely to the master of the house, who returned his courtesy and led us to a comfortably furnished room farther down the corridor.

"SEE HERE, de Grandin," I demanded when our host had wished us a pleasant good-night and closed the door upon us, "what was your idea in giving that child an impotent dose like that . . . ?"

"S-s-sh!" he cut me short with a fierce whisper. "That young girl, *mon ami*, is no more suffering from encephalitis than you or I. There is no characteristic swelling of the face or neck,

no diagnostic hardening of the jugular vein. Her temperature was a bit subnormal, it is true — but upon her breath I detected the odor of chloral hydrate. For some reason, good I hope, but bad I fear, she is drugged, and I thought it best to play the fool and pretend I believed the man's statements. *Pardieu*, the fool who knows himself no fool has an immense advantage over the fool who believes him one, my friend."

"But . . ."

"But me no buts, Friend Trowbridge; remember how the door of this house opened with none to touch it, recall how it closed behind us in the same way, and observe this, if you will." Stepping softly, he crossed the room, pulled aside the chintz curtains at the window and tapped lightly on the frame which held the thick plate glass panes. "*Regardez vous*," he ordered, tapping the frame a second time.

Like every other window I had seen in the house, this one was of the casement type, small panes of heavy glass being sunk into latticelike frames. Under de Grandin's directions I tapped the latter, and found them not painted wood, as I had supposed, but stoutly welded and bolted metal. Also, to my surprise, I found the turnbuckles for opening the casement were only dummies, the metal frames being actually securely bolted to the stone sills. To all intents,

we were as firmly incarcerated as though serving a sentence in the state penitentiary.

"The door . . ." I began, but he shook his head.

Obedying his gesture, I crossed the room and turned the handle lightly. It twisted under the pressure of my fingers, but, though we had heard no warning click of lock or bolt, the door itself was as firmly fastened as though nailed shut.

"Wh—why," I asked stupidly, "what's it all mean, de Grandin?"

"*Je ne sais quoi*," he answered with a shrug, "but one thing I know: I like not this house, Friend Trowbridge. I . . ."

Above the hissing of the rain against the windows and the howl of the sea-wind about the gables, there suddenly rose a scream, wire-edged with inarticulate terror, freighted with utter, transcendental anguish of body and soul.

"*Cordieu!*" He threw up his head like a hound hearing the call of the pack from far away. "Did you hear it, too, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Of course," I answered, every nerve in my body trembling in horripilation with the echo of the hopeless wail.

"*Pardieu*," he repeated, "I like this house less than ever, now! Come, let us move this dresser before our door. It is safer that

we sleep behind barricades this night, I think."

We blocked the door, and I was soon sound asleep.

"TROWBRIDGE, Trowbridge, my friend" — de Grandin drove a sharp elbow into my ribs — "wake up, I beseech you. Name of a green goat, you lie like one dead, save for your so abominable snoring!"

"Eh?" I answered sleepily, thrusting myself deeper beneath the voluminous bedclothes. Despite the unusual occurrences of the night I was tired to the point of exhaustion, and fairly drunk with sleep.

"Up; arise, my friend," he ordered, shaking me excitedly. "The coast is clear, I think, and it is high time we did some exploring."

"Rats!" I scoffed, disinclined to leave my comfortable couch. "What's the use of wandering about a strange house to gratify a few unfounded suspicions? The girl might have been given a dose of chloral hydrate, but the chances are her father thought he was helping her when he gave it. As for these trick devices for opening and locking doors, the old man apparently lives here alone and has installed these mechanical aids to lessen his work. He has to hobble around with a cane, you know."

"Ah!" my companion assented sarcastically. "And that scream we heard, did he install that as

an aid to his infirmities, also?"

"Perhaps the girl woke up with a nightmare," I hazarded, but he made an impatient gesture.

"Perhaps the moon is composed of green cheese, also," he replied. "Up, up and dress; my friend. This house should be investigated while yet there is time. Attend me: But five minutes ago, through this very window, I did observe *Monsieur* our host, attired in a raincoat, depart from his own front door, and without his cane. *Parbleu*, he did skip as agilely as any boy, I assure you. Even now he is almost at the spot where we abandoned your automobile. What he intends doing there I know not. What I intend doing I know full well. Do you accompany me or not?"

"Oh, I suppose so," I agreed, crawling from the bed and slipping into my clothes. "How are you going to get past that locked door?"

He flashed me one of his sudden smiles, shooting the points of his little blond mustache upward like the horns of an inverted crescent. "Observe," he ordered, displaying a short length of thin wire. "In the days when woman's hair was still her crowning glory, what mighty deeds a lady could encompass with a hairpin! *Pardieu*, there was one little grisette in Paris who showed me some tricks in

the days before the war! Regard me, if you please."

Deftly he thrust the pliable loop of wire into the keyhole, twisting it tentatively back and forth, at length pulling it out and regarding it carefully. "*Tres bien*," he muttered as he reached into an inside pocket, bringing out a heavier bit of wire.

"See," he displayed the finer wire, "with this I take an impression of that lock's tumblers, now" — quickly he bent the heavier wire to conform to the waved outline of the lighter loop — "*voilà*, I have a key!"

And he had. The lock gave readily to the pressure of his improvised key, and we stood in the long, dark hall, staring about us half curiously, half fearfully.

"This way, if you please," de Grandin ordered; "first we will look in upon *la jeunesse*, to see how it goes with her."

We walked on tiptoe down the corridor, entered the chamber where the girl lay, and approached the bed.

SHE WAS LYING with her hands folded upon her breast in the manner of those composed for their final rest, her wide, periwinkle-blue eyes staring sightlessly before her, the short, tightly curled ringlets of her blonde, bobbed hair surrounding her drawn, pallid face like a golden nimbus encircling

the ivory features of a saint in some carved ikon.

My companion approached the bed softly, placing one hand on the girl's wrist with professional precision. "Temperature low, pulse weak," he murmured, checking off her symptoms. "Complexion pale to the point of lividity — ha, now for the eyes; sleeping, her pupils should have been contracted, while they should now be dilate — *Dieu de Dieu!* Trowbridge, my friend, come here.

"Look," he commanded, pointing to the apathetic girl's face. "Those eyes — *grand Dieu*, those eyes! It is sacrilege, nothing less."

I looked into the girl's face, then started back with a half-suppressed cry of horror. Asleep, as she had been when we first saw her, the child had been pretty to the point of loveliness. Her features were small and regular, clean-cut as those of a face in a cameo, the tendrils of her light-yellow hair had lent her a dainty, ethereal charm comparable to that of a Dresden china shepherdess. It had needed but the raising of her delicate, long-lashed eyelids to give her face the animation of some laughing sprite playing truant from fairyland.

Her lids were raised now, but the eyes they unveiled were no clear, joyous windows of a tranquil soul. Rather, they were the peepholes of a spirit in torment. The irides were a lovely shade

of blue, it is true, but the optics themselves were things of horror. Rolling grotesquely to right and left, they peered futilely in opposite directions, lending to her sweet, pale face the half-ludicrous, wholly hideous expression of a bloating frog.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, turning from the deformed girl with a feeling of disgust akin to nausea; "What a terrible affliction!"

De Grandin made no reply, but bent over the girl's still form, gazing intently at her malformed eyes. "It is not natural," he announced. "The muscles have been tampered with, and tampered with by someone who is a master hand at surgery. Will you get me your syringe and some strychnin, Friend Trowbridge? This poor one is still unconscious."

I HASTENED to our bedroom and returned with the hypodermic and stimulant, then stood beside him, watching eagerly, as he administered a strong injection.

The girl's narrow chest fluttered as the powerful drug took effect, and the pale lids dropped for a second over her repulsive eyes. Then, with a sob which was half moan, she attempted to raise herself on her elbow, fell back again, and, with apparent effort, gasped, "The mirror, let me have the mirror! Oh, tell me it isn't true; tell me it

was a trick of some sort. Oh, the horrible thing I saw in the glass couldn't have been I. Was it?"

"*Tiens, ma petite,*" de Grandin replied, "but you speak in riddles. What is it you would know?"

"He — he" — the girl faltered weakly, forcing her quivering lips to frame the words — "that horrible old man showed me a mirror a little while ago and said the face in it was mine. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!"

"Eh? What is this?" de Grandin demanded on a rising note. "He? Horrible old man? Are you not his daughter? Is he not your father?"

"No," the girl gasped, so low her denial was scarcely audible. "I was driving home from Mac-kettsdale last — oh, I forget when it was, but it was at night — and my tires punctured. I — I think there must have been glass on the road, for the shoes were cut to ribbons. I saw the light in this house and came to ask for help. An old man — oh, I thought he was so nice and kind! — let me in and said he was all alone here and about to eat dinner, and asked me to join him. I ate some — some — oh, I don't remember what it was — and the next thing I knew he was standing by my bed, holding a mirror up to me and telling me it was my face I saw in the glass. Oh, please, please, tell me it was some ter-

rible trick he played on me. I'm not truly hideous, am I?"

"*Morbleu!*" de Grandin muttered softly, tugging at the ends of his mustache. "What is all this?"

To the girl he said: "But of course not. You are like a flower, *Mademoiselle*. A little flower that dances in the wind. You . . ."

"And my eyes, they aren't — they aren't" — she interrupted with piteous eagerness — "please tell me they aren't . . ."

"*Mais non, ma chere,*" he assured her. "Your eyes are like the *pervenche* that mirrors the sky in springtime. They are . . ."

"Let — let me see the mirror, please," she interrupted in an anxious whisper. "I'd like to see for myself, if you — oh, I feel all wet inside . . ." She lapsed back against the pillow, her lids mercifully veiling the hideously distorted eyes and restoring her face to tranquil beauty.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin breathed. "The chloral re-asserted itself none too soon for Jules de Grandin's comfort, Friend Trowbridge. Sooner would I have gone to the rack than have shown that pitiful child her face in a mirror."

"But what's it all mean?" I asked. "She says she came here, and . . ."

"And the rest remains for us to find out, I think," he replied evenly. "Come, we lose time,

and to lose time is to be caught, my friend."

DE GRANDIN led the way down the hall, peering eagerly into each door we passed in search of the owner's chamber, but before his quest was satisfied he stopped abruptly at the head of the stairs. "Observe, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered, pointing a carefully manicured forefinger to a pair of buttons, one white, one black, set in the wall. "Unless I am more mistaken than I think I am, we have here the key to the situation — or at least to the front door."

He pushed vigorously at the white button, then ran to the curve of the stairs to note the result.

Sure enough, the heavy door swung open on its hinges of cast bronze, letting gusts of rain drive into the lower hall.

"*Pardieu*," he ejaculated, "we have here the open sesame; let us see if we possess the closing secret as well! Press the black button, Trowbridge, my friend, while I watch."

I did his bidding, and a delighted exclamation told me the door had closed.

"Now what?" I asked, joining him on the stairway.

"U'm," he pulled first one, then the other end of his diminutive mustache meditatively; "the house possesses its attractions, Friend Trowbridge, but I believe it would be well

if we went out to observe what our friend, *le vieillard horrible*, does. I like not to have one who shows young girls their disfigured faces in mirrors near our conveyance."

Slipping into our raincoats we opened the door, taking care to place a wad of paper on the sill to prevent its closing tightly enough to latch, and scurried out into the storm.

As we left the shelter of the porch a shaft of indistinct light shone through the rain, as my car was swung from the highway and headed toward a depression to the left of the house.

"*Parbleu*, he is a thief, this one!" de Grandin exclaimed excitedly. "*Hola, Monsieur!*" He ran forward, swinging his arms like a pair of semaphores. "What sort of business is it you make with our *moteur*?"

The wailing of the storm tore the words from his lips and hurled them away, but the little Frenchman was not to be thwarted. "*Pardieu*," he gasped, bending his head against the wind-driven rain, "I will stop the scoundrel if — *nam d'un coq*, he has done it!"

Even as he spoke the old man flung open the car's forward door and leaped, allowing the machine to go crashing down a low, steep embankment into a lake of slimy swamp-mud.

For a moment the vandal stood contemplating his work, then burst into a peal of wild

laughter more malignant than any profanity.

"*Parbleu*, robber, *Apache*! you shall laugh from the other side of your mouth!" de Grandin promised, as he made for the old man.

But the other seemed oblivious of our presence. Still chuckling at his work, he turned toward the house, stopped short as a sudden heavy gust of wind shook the trees along the roadway, then started forward with a yell of terror as a great branch, torn bodily from a towering oak tree came crashing toward the earth.

He might as well have attempted to dodge a meteorite. Like an arrow from the bow of divine justice, the great timber hurtled down, pinning his frail body to the ground like a worm beneath a laborer's brogan.

"Trowbridge, my friend," de Grandin announced matter-of-factly, "observe the evil effects of stealing motor cars."

We lifted the heavy bough from the prostrate man and turned him over on his back. De Grandin on one side, I on the other, we made a hasty examination, arriving at the same finding simultaneously. His spinal column was snapped like a pipestem.

"You have some last statement to make, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked curtly. "If so, you had

best be about it, your time is short."

"Y—yes," the stricken man replied weakly. "I — I meant to kill you, for you might have hit upon my secret. As it is, you may publish it to the world, that all may know what it meant to offend a Marston. In my room you will find the documents. My — my pets — are — in — the — cellar. She — was — to — have — been — one — of — them."

The pauses between his words became longer and longer, his voice grew weaker with each labored syllable. As he whispered the last sentence painfully there was a gurgling sound, and a tiny stream of blood welled up at the corner of his mouth. His narrow chest rose and fell once with a convulsive movement, then his jaw dropped limply. He was dead.

"Oh ho," de Grandin remarked, "it is a hemorrhage which finished him. A broken rib piercing his lung. U'm? I should have guessed it. Come, my friend, let us carry him to the house, then see what it was he meant by that talk of documents and pets. A pest upon the fellow for dying with his riddle half explained! Did he not know that Jules de Grandin can not resist the challenge of a riddle? *Parbleu*, we will solve this mystery, *Monsieur le Mort*, if we have to hold an autopsy to do so!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, hush, de Grandin," I besought, shocked at his heartlessness. "The man is dead."

"Ah bahl!" he returned scornfully. "Dead or not, did he not steal your motor car?"

WE LAID OUR gruesome burden on the hall couch and mounted the stairs to the second floor. With de Grandin in the lead we found the dead man's room and began a systematic search for the papers he had mentioned, almost with his last breath. After some time my companion unearthed a thick, leather-bound portfolio from the lower drawer of a beautiful old mahogany highboy, and spread its wide leaves open on the white-counterpaned bed.

"Ah," he drew forth several papers and held them to the light, "we begin to make the progress, Friend Trowbridge. What is this?"

He held out a newspaper clipping cracked from long folding and yellowed with age. It read:

Actress Jilts Surgeon's Crippled Son on Eve of Wedding

Declaring she could not stand the sight of his deformity, and that she had engaged herself to him only in a moment of thoughtless pity, Dora Lee, well-known variety actress, last night repudiated her promise to marry John Biersfield Marston, Jr., hopelessly

crippled son of Dr. John Biersfield Marston, the well-known surgeon and expert osteologist. Neither the abandoned bridegroom nor his father could be seen by reporters from the *Planet* last night.

"Very good," de Grandin nodded, "we need go no farther with that account. A young woman, it would seem, once broke her promise to marry a cripple, and, judging from this paper's date, that was in 1896. Here is another, what do you make of it?"

The clipping he handed me read as follows:

Surgeon's Son a Suicide

Still sitting in the wheel-chair from which he has not moved during his waking hours since he was hopelessly crippled while playing polo in England ten years ago, John Biersfield Marston, son of the famous surgeon of the same name, was found in his bedroom this morning by his valet. A rubber hose was connected with a gas jet, the other end being held in the young man's mouth.

Young Marston was jilted by Dora Lee, well-known vaudeville actress, on the day before the date set for their wedding, one month ago. He is reported to have been extremely low-spirited since his desertion by his fiancée.

Dr. Marston, the bereaved father, when seen by reporters from the *Planet* this morning, declared the actress was responsible for his son's death and announced his intention of holding her accountable. When asked if legal proceedings were contemplated, he declined further information.

"So?" de Grandin nodded shortly. "Now this one, if you please."

The third clipping was brief to the point of curttness:

Well-Known Surgeon Retires

Dr. John Biersfield Marston, widely known throughout this section of the country as an expert in operations concerning the bones, has announced his intention of retiring from practise. His house has been sold, and he will move from the city.

"The record is cl  ar so far," de Grandin asserted, studying the first clipping with raised eyebrows, "but — *morbleu*, my friend, look, look at this picture. This Dora Lee, of whom does she remind you? Eh?"

I took the clipping again and looked intently at the illustration of the article announcing young Marston's broken engagement. The woman in the picture was young and inclined to be overdressed in the voluminous, fluffy mode of the days before the Spanish-American War.

"U'm, no one whom I know . . ." I began, but halted abruptly as a sudden likeness struck me. Despite the towering pompadour arrangement of her blonde hair and the unbecoming straw sailor hat above the coiffure, the woman in the picture bore a certain resemblance to the disfigured girl we had seen a half-hour before.

The Frenchman saw recogni-

tion dawn in my face, and nodded agreement. "But of course," he said. "Now, the question is, is this young girl whose eyes are so out of alinement a relative of this Dora Lee, or is the resemblance a coincidence, and if so, what lies behind it? *Hein?*"

"I don't know," I admitted, "but there must be some connection . . ."

"Connection? Of course there is a connection," de Grandin affirmed, rummaging deeper in the portfolio. "A-a-ah! What is this? *Nom d'un nom*, Friend Trowbridge, I think I smell the daylight! Look!"

HE HELD A full-page story from one of the sensational New York dailies before him, his eyes glued to the flowing type and crude, coarse-screened half-tones of half a dozen young women which composed the article.

"WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE MISSING GIRLS?" I read in bold-faced type across the top of the page.

"Are sinister, unseen hands reaching out from the darkness to seize our girls from palace and hovel, shop, stage and office?" the article asked rhetorically. *"Where are Ellen Munro and Dorothy Sawyer and Phyllis Bouchet and three other lovely, light-haired girls who have walked into oblivion during the past year?"*

I read to the end the sensa-

tional account of the girls' disappearances. The cases seemed fairly similar; each of the vanished young women had failed to return to her home and had never been accounted for in any manner, and in no instance, according to the newspaper, had there been any assignable reason for voluntary departure.

"*Parbleu*, but he was stupid, even for a journalist!" de Grandin asserted as I completed my inspection of the story. "Why, I wager even my good Friend Trowbridge has already noticed one important fact which this writer has treated as though it were as commonplace as the nose on his face."

"Sorry to disappoint you, old chap," I answered, "but it looks to me as though the reporter had covered the case from every possible angle."

"Ah? So?" he replied sarcastically. "*Morbleu*, we shall have to consult the oculist in your behalf when we return home, my friend. Look, look, I beseech you, upon the pictures of these so totally absent and unaccounted for young women, *cher ami*, and tell me if you do not observe a certain likeness among them, not only a resemblance to each other, but to that Mademoiselle Lee who jilted the son of Dr. Marston? Can you see it, now I have pointed it out?"

"No — wh — why, yes — yes, of course!" I responded, run-

ning my eye over the pictures accompanying the story. "By the Lord Harry, de Grandin, you're right; you might almost say there is a family resemblance between these girls! You've put your fingers on it, I do believe."

"*Helas*, no!" he answered with a shrug. "I have put my finger on nothing as yet, my friend. I reach, I grope, I feel about me like a blind man tormented by a crowd of naughty little boys, but nothing do the poor fingers of my mind encounter. Pahl! Jules de Grandin, you are one great fool! Think, think, stupid one!"

He seated himself on the edge of the bed, cupping his face in his hands and leaning forward till his elbows rested on his knees.

Suddenly he sprang erect, one of his elfish smiles passing across his small, regular features. "*Nom d'un cha trouge*, my friend, I have it — I have it!" he announced. "The pets — the pets that old stealer of motor cars spoke of! They are in the basement! *Pardieu*, we will see those pets, *cher Trowbridge*; with our four collective eyes we will see them. Did not that so execrable stealer declare she was to have been one of them? Now, in the name of Satan and brimstone, whom could he have meant by 'she' if not that unfortunate child

with eyes like *la grenouille*? Eh?"

"Why . . ." I began, but he waved me forward.

"Come, come; let us go," he urged. "I am impatient, I am restless, I am not to be restrained. We shall investigate and see for ourselves what sort of pets are kept by one who shows young girls their deformed faces in mirrors and — *parbleu!* — steals motor cars from my friends."

HURRYING DOWN the main stairway, we hunted about for the cellar entrance, finally located the door and, holding above our heads a pair of candles from the hall, began descending a flight of rickety steps into a pitch-black basement, rock-walled and, judging by its damp, moldy odor, unfloored save by the bare, moist earth beneath the house.

"*Parbleu*, the dungeons of the chateau at Carcassonne are more cheerful than this," de Grandin commented as he paused at the stairs' foot, holding his candle aloft to make a better inspection of the dismal place.

I suppressed a shudder of mingled chill and apprehension as I stared at the blank stone walls, unpierced by windows or other openings of any sort, and made ready to retrace my steps. "Nothing here," I announced. "You can see that

with half an eye. The place is as empty as . . ."

"Perhaps, Friend Trowbridge," he agreed, "but Jules de Grandin does not look with half an eye. He uses both eyes, and uses them more than once if his first glance does not prove sufficient. Behold that bit of wood on the earth yonder. What do you make of it?"

"U'm — a piece of flooring, maybe," I hazarded.

"Maybe yes, maybe no," he answered. "Let us see."

Crossing the cellar, he bent above the planks, then turned to me with a satisfied smile. "Flooring does not ordinarily have ringbolts in it, my friend," he remarked, bending to seize the iron ring which was made fast to the boards by a stout staple.

"Hal!" As he heaved upward the planks came away from the black earth, disclosing a board-lined well about three feet square and of uncertain depth. An almost vertical ladder of two-by-four timbers led downward from the trap-door to the well's impenetrable blackness.

"*Allons*, we descend," he commented, turning about and setting his foot on the topmost rung of the ladder.

"Don't be a fool," I advised. "You don't know what's down there."

"True" — his head was level with the floor as he answered — "but I shall know, with luck,

in a few moments. Do you come?"

I sighed with vexation as I prepared to follow him.

ATT THE ladder's foot he paused, raising his candle and looking about inquiringly. Directly before us was a passageway through the earth, ceiled with heavy planks and shored up with timbers like the lateral workings of a primitive mine.

"Ah, the plot shows complications," he murmured, stepping briskly into the dark tunnel. "Do you come, Friend Trowbridge?"

I followed, wondering what manner of thing might be at the end of the black, musty passage, but nothing but fungus-grown timbers and walls of moist, black earth met my questing gaze.

De Grandin preceeded me by some paces, and, I suppose, we had gone fifteen feet through the passage when a gasp of mingled surprise and horror from my companion brought me beside him in two long strides. Fastened with nails to the timbers at each side of the tunnel were a number of white, glistening objects, objects which, because of their very familiarity, denied their identity to my wondering eyes. There was no mistaking the things; even a layman could not have failed to recognize them

for what they were. I, as a physician, knew them even better. To the right of the passage hung fourteen perfectly articulated skeletons of human legs, complete from foot to ilium, gleaming white and ghostly in the flickering light of the candles.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"*Sang du diable!*" Jules de Grandin commented. "Behold what is there, my friend," he pointed to the opposite wall. Fourteen bony arms, complete from hand to shoulder-joint, hung pendulously from the tunnel's upright timbers.

"*Pardieu,*" de Grandin muttered, "I have known men who collected stuffed birds and dried insects; I have known those who stored away Egyptian mummies — even the skulls of men long dead — but never before have I seen a collection of arms and legs! *Parbleu,* he was *caduc* — mad as a hatter, this one, or I am much mistaken!"

"So these were his pets?" I answered. "Yes, the man was undoubtedly mad to keep such a collection, and in a place like this. Poor fellow . . ."

"*Nom d'un canon!*" de Grandin broke in; "what was that?"

From the darkness before us there came a queer, inarticulate sound, such as a man might make attempting to speak with a mouth half-filled with food, and, as though the noise had

wakened an echo slumbering in the cavern, the sound was repeated, multiplied again and again till it resembled the babbling of half a dozen overgrown infants — or an equal number of full grown imbeciles.

"Onward!" Responding to the challenge of the unknown like a warrior obeying the trumpet's call to charge, de Grandin dashed toward the strange noise, swung about, flashing his candle this side and that, then:

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" he almost shrieked. "Look, Friend Trowbridge, look and say that you see what I see, or have I, too, gone mad?"

LINED UP AGAINST the wall was a series of seven small wooden boxes, each with a door composed of upright slats before it, similar in construction to the coops in which country folk pen brooding hens — and no larger. In each of the hatches huddled an object, the like of which I had never before seen, even in the terrors of nightmare.

The things had the torsos of human beings, though hideously shrunken from starvation and encrusted with scales of filth, but there all resemblances to mankind ceased. From shoulders and waist there twisted flaccid tentacles of unsupported flesh, the upper ones terminating in flat, paddlelike flippers which had some remote resemblance to hands, the lower ones ending

in almost shapeless stubs which resembled feet only in that each had a fringe of five shriveled, unsupported protuberances of withered flesh.

On scrawny necks were balanced caricatures of faces, flat, noseless chinless countenances with horrible crossed or divergent eyes, mouths widened almost beyond resemblance to buccal orifices, and — horror of horrors! — elongated, *split* tongues protruding several inches from the lips and wagging impotently in vain efforts to form words.

"Satan, thou art outdone!" de Grandin cried as he held his candle before a scrap of paper decorating one of the cages after the manner of a sign before an animal's den at the zoo. "Observe!" he ordered, pointing a shaking finger at the notice.

I looked, then recoiled, sick with horror. The paper bore the picture and name of Ellen Munro, one of the girls mentioned as missing in the newspaper article we had found in the dead man's bedroom.

Beneath the photograph was scribbled in an irregular hand: "*Paid 1-25-97.*"

Sick at heart we walked down the line of pens. Each was labeled with the picture of a young and pretty girl with the notation, "*Paid,*" followed by a date. Every girl named as missing in the newspaper

was represented in the cages.

Last of all, in a coop somewhat smaller than the rest, we found a body more terribly mutilated than any. This was marked with the photograph and name of Dora Lee. Beneath her name was the date of her "payment," written in bold red figures.

"*Parbleu*, what are we to do, my friend?" de Grandin asked in an hysterical whisper. "We can not return these poor ones to the world, that would be the worst form of cruelty; yet — yet I shrink from the act of mercy I know they would ask me to perform if they could speak."

"Let's go up," I begged. "We must think this thing over, de Grandin, and if I stay here any longer I shall faint."

"*Bien*," he agreed, and turned to follow me from the cavern of horrors.

"IT IS TO consider," he began as we reached the upper hall once more. "If we give those so pitiful ones the stroke of mercy we are murderers before the law, yet what service could we render them by bringing them once more into the world? Our choice is a hard one, my friend."

I nodded.

"*Marbleu*, but he was clever, that one," the Frenchman continued, half to me, half to himself. "What a surgeon! Four-

teen instances of Wyeth's amputation of the hip and as many more of the shoulder — and every patient lived, lived to suffer the tortures of that hell-hole down there! But it is marvelous! None but a madman could have done it.

"Bethink you, Friend Trowbridge. Think how the mighty man of medicine brooded over the suicide of his crippled son, meditating hatred and vengeance for the heartless woman who had jilted him. Then — snap! went his great mentality, and from hating one woman he fell to hating all, to plot vengeance against the many for the sin of the one. And, *cordieu*, what a vengeance! How he must have laid plans to secure his victims; how he must have worked to prepare that hell-under-the-earth to house those poor, broken bodies which were his handiwork, and how he must have drawn upon the great surgical skill which was his, even in his madness, to transform those once lovely ones into the visions of horror we have just beheld! Horror of horrors! To remove the bones and let the girls still live!"

He rose, pacing impatiently across the hall. "What to do? What to do?" he demanded, striking his open hands against his forehead.

I followed his nervous steps with my eyes, but my brain was too numbed by the hideous

things I had just seen to be able to respond to his question.

I looked hopelessly past him at the angle of the wall by the great fireplace, rubbed my eyes and looked again. Slowly, but surely, the wall was declining from the perpendicular.

"De Grandin," I shouted, glad of some new phenomenon to command my thoughts, "the wall — the wall's leaning!"

"Eh, the wall?" he queried. "*Pardieu*, yes! It is the rain; the foundations are undermined. Quick, quick, my friend! To the cellars, or those unfortunate ones are undone!"

We scrambled down the stairs leading to the basement, but already the earth floor was sopping with water. The well leading to the madman's sub-cellar was more than half full of bubbling, earthy ooze.

"Mary, have pity!" de Grandin exclaimed. "Like rats in a trap, they did die. God rest their tired souls" — he shrugged his shoulders as he turned to retrace his steps — "it is better so. Now, Friend Trowbridge, do you hasten aloft and bring down that young girl from the room above. We must run for it if we do not wish to be crushed under the falling timbers of this house of abominations!"

THE STORM had spent itself and a red, springtime sun was peeping over the horizon as de Grandin and I trudged

up my front steps with the mutilated girl stumbling wearily between us. We had managed to flag a car when we got out

"Put her to bed, my excellent one," de Grandin ordered Nora, my housekeeper, who came to meet us enveloped in righteous indignation and an outing flannel nightgown. "*Parbleu*, she has had many troubles!"

In the study, a glass of steaming whisky and hot water in one hand, a vile-smelling French cigarette in the other, he faced me across the desk. "How was it you knew not that house, my friend?" he demanded.

I grinned sheepishly. "I took the wrong turning at the detour," I explained, "and got on the Yerbysville Road. It's just recently been hard-surfaced, and I haven't used it for years because it was always impassable. Thinking we were on the Andover Pike all the while, I never connected the place with the old Olmsted Mansion I'd seen hundreds of times from the road."

"Ah, yes," he agreed, nodding thoughtfully, "a little turn from the right way, and — *pouf!* — what a distance we have to retrace."

"Now, about the girl upstairs," I began, but he waved the question aside.

"The mad one had but begun

his devil's work on her," he replied. "I, Jules de Grandin, will operate on her eyes and make them as straight as before, nor will I accept one penny for my work. Meantime, we must find

her kindred and notify them she is safe and in good hands.

"And now" — he handed me his empty tumbler — "a little more whisky, if you please, Friend Trowbridge."

BOOKS

THE PHANTOM FIGHTER

by Seabury Quinn

Mycroft & Moran: Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1966; 263 pp.; \$5.00.

"One evening in the spring of 1925," writes the author in his explanation, "I was in that state that every writer knows and dreads; a story was due my publisher, and there didn't seem to be a plot in the world. Accordingly, with nothing particular in mind, I picked up my pen and — literally making it up as I went along — wrote the first story which appears in this book."

An accomplished writer can do this, on occasion at least, without ending up with something which looks and reads as if he had no idea of what he was doing. *The Terror on the Links* turned out to be the first of a series which would extend over a period of 25 years. No other character in weird fiction has maintained readers' affection throughout so many appearances, over such a stretch of years. And if the response to the first issue of SMS means anything, this series still has appeal, dated as many of the stories now are.

For this volume, the author revised and updated ten of the de Grandin stories: The initial tale referred to above (originally titled *The*

Horror on the Links), *The Dead Hand*, *Children of Ubasti*, *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul*, *The Corpse-Master*, *The Pokergeist*, *The Wolf of St. Bonnot*, *Restless Souls*, *The Silver Countess*, and *The Doom* (originally *The Curse*) of the House of Phtpps.

What the updating has amounted to has been to take the tales out of the Prohibition Era, which was their original background, and put them roughly into the present. Since nothing in the stories absolutely requires that background, no harm is done at all; references to the specific milieu of the 20's and 30's (which was the present, of course, when they first appeared) are replaced by references which give more feeling of contemporaneity. This is not overdone and I did not miss the older references. The stories were absorbing then and are no less so now.

The de Grandin canon includes tales both "supernatural" and tales *biarre*, but not "supernatural". The present volume contains only one of the latter — but I won't spoil the newcomer's fun by specifying which one. All are very good, although all are not of equal strength; I find that Warburg Tantavul interests me least in this volume, just as he did when I first read about him in 1934, having devoured some fourteen of the adventures up to then. And I share the

(Turn to page. 91)

The Men In Black

by John Brunner

THE FIRST time Royston saw the man in black was as he paused before entering the gym. The door of the gym was a big mirror; across the middle of the reflection gilt letters asked SATISFIED? and a foot below that it said COME IN!

Royston was going in. He was one of the customers who came because he was satisfied, and meant to stay that way. He was more preening before the glass than actually looking at himself. He'd learned how to exploit his magnificent physique and leonine blond hair when he was about fifteen. Now, at forty, he looked as well as he felt; and right now, that was terrific.

He smiled. Perfect, even teeth showed in his reflected face. He cocked his head to judge the effect, and the movement brought the man in black into the corner of the mirror.

Royston froze.

The man was just standing there, watching him — not doing anything. His face was as blank as a wax dummy's. Nonetheless, Royston was embarrassed at having been caught openly admiring himself. Hastily he pushed at the door and entered the gym.

He'd forgotten the man in black long before the end of his hour-long workout. He enjoyed the atmosphere of this

Little by little he began to notice the ubiquitous follower.

place too much. He knew — the masseurs and coaches had often told him — that just about every other customer of his age who came here did so to sweat off a pot belly or wear down a seat swollen with chair-polishing. Royston came here to keep the shape and muscle tone he'd had at twenty, and he was doing fine.

There were a bunch of pansies in, from a theater up the street with a big new musical in rehearsal, and a couple of them started hanging around him. A word from one of the coaches, however, sent them back to their buddies with disappointed looks. Royston grinned. It was two years since one of that sort had really bothered him, and that time he'd get so disgusted he let the boy get him alone in the changing-room — and broke his nose for him.

After that, the coaches warned them off.

Not that he minded them looking envious, of course; in fact, envy from even that source set him up for the day. When he left the gym he was humming to himself.

But as the mirrored door swung shut behind him, he stopped in his tracks. The man in black was still there, watching him.

Correction: not specifically watching *him*, but giving a quick once-over to each of the passers-by, as if waiting for an

acquaintance whose face he didn't clearly remember. His expression was still an absolute blank.

He was still standing in the same place when Royston hailed a cab and got in.

Royston shrugged. If his friends stood him up for a solid hour, that was his worry. There were more important matters to consider.

HE CONSIDERED them during a pleasant afternoon alone in his apartment. He reached his decision while pulling through his two-fifty Mannlicher, and worked out the details of what he must do to implement it while putting some clear lacquer on the newly-polished barrel of an elderly jezail. Nothing was farther from his mind than men in black when he left home for his crucial date of that evening.

Until he saw that a man in black, with a face of complete blankness, was sauntering along the road not far away.

Instantly he was alert. In his chosen way of life he had long ago learned not to dismiss such things as coincidence. He had meant to hail a cab as soon as possible; instead, he took to the busy underground and went four stations in the wrong direction before emerging and finding his cab. He kept a watchful eye on anyone who might be following as he came near to Lu-

labelle's home, and got out two blocks early just in case.

There was no one suspicious in sight. Maybe it had been a coincidence after all. Of course, his detour meant he was late arriving at Lulabelle's — but that was no drawback after the decision he had come to earlier.

Lulabelle was twenty-one and extremely pretty. She was married to a man only a year or two older, who obviously knew hardly anything about women. His family had settled a small fortune on him when he married, since which time he had apparently acted under the impression that if he gave Lulabelle enough cash she wouldn't want anything else. Royston, whose face was his fortune, knew better, and had proved it.

In fact, the only thing wrong with Lulabelle was that her husband was due back from a business trip to Japan in one week's time.

Royston had been tempted to put off his withdrawal movement another couple of days. He liked Lulabelle, and she had spent a good deal of accumulated passion on him, which wasn't yet exhausted. Still . . . there were plenty of women in the world, and his habit of leaving himself several days to get out from under had always paid off.

With a slight pang of regret, he set his plan in motion. Over dinner he bored her by telling

her a story about a man-eating leopard; he told it very well, considering it wasn't true, but he knew very well he had told it before. Later, he was cooler than usual, and pretended not to be listening when she retailed some gossip to him — he took it in with care, of course, because scandal was always useful, but made sure his eyes were wandering and his comments were random ones.

It worked; it always worked. Hurt and puzzled, Lulabelle pleaded tiredness when he took her home, and refused to let him stay. That was according to plan too; it was a common first response, the withholding of sexual privileges on a basis of "See what you're cheating yourself out of!"

He was standing on the front steps of her apartment block trying to persuade himself that the proceeds from a gold cigarette case, cuff-links, and sundry other recent presents was a fair recompense for his self-denial, when abruptly he saw that a man in black, with a face as impassive as a wall, was standing across the street.

A chill went down his spine, and he decided that his early night was a very good idea.

THE NEXT morning was bright and sunny, but he woke to it in a black mood. Lulabelle was effectively over as of last night, and no qualifications.

That would teach him to break his usual rule about living spouses. Japan was a long way off, but even so . . .

Time to go hunting again, and this time for a prey less chancey than another Lulabelle.

He thought with nostalgia of Moira Parmenter ten years ago, who had set his standards for him. He shook his head sadly at the recollection of her suicide. Such a pity, that. It could have been avoided if he'd perfected his technique for letting women down gently a year or two sooner. And now he had nothing to remember by at all; the Mercedes and the matched pair of Purdy guns had had to go the way of all fleshpots.

Still, even if the Moira Parmenters were exceptional, the species typified by her was available enough.

He ate breakfast with a book on tiger-shooting open beside his plate. His African background had been reliable for a long time, but recently he had picked up a very fine tiger-skin too good to waste, and there were no tigers in Africa.

Once, he had thought of going on safari in reality; he had even made plans about the trip. Then something came up and he had to postpone it; and when he was next in a position to consider it, the idea didn't seem so attractive — scorching sun, and insect-bites, and a diet of biltong. So the Mannlicher

and the Mausers and the rest stayed on the wall, and the hunter remained satisfied with his chosen prey.

For — and he chuckled as he stowed the book about tigers next to his leatherbound volumes of Rowland Ward game records — wasn't he the big game hunter *par excellence*? What game could compare with a human quarry?

He had trophies aplenty on his walls, and still more in the bank. And there was danger in his hunting, too; several times he had himself become the hunted, stalked by private detectives and angry husbands. He laughed.

Did he have a case of the same thing on his hands at the moment, with these men in black who had three times so far shown themselves to him? It wasn't likely — they weren't like any detectives who had ever followed him before, and they were completely open about their presence. But they might have instructions to warn him off . . .

He shrugged. The only sensible course at the moment was to start a round of innocent actions, and see what happened. A visit to the barber would be a good start.

HE WAS shaken when he rose from the barbers chair and dusted the last hair-clippings from his neck. As he turned to

the street window of the shop, he saw a man in black gazing expressionlessly at him.

He was still there when Royston came out, not making any attempt to cover his interest. Royston set his lips in a narrow line. This was going too far.

He turned along the street. At random he paused to study the window display of an oculist — something he would normally have avoided by instinct, for the threat of having to wear glasses was a recurrent nightmare.

The man in black was coming along the street in the same direction.

That settled it. His plans for letting Lulabelle down gently were shot to blazes, and he was going to have to take the chance of her suffering an attack of conscience and confessing to her husband. With these men in black trailing him — to warn him off, obviously, since they were so open about their staring at him — he wasn't going to call her up, let alone go near her.

In a very grim mood he turned into a convenient restaurant for lunch.

The mood lightened miraculously. He had been sitting at his table a mere ten minutes, with the restaurant getting crowded around him, when the headwaiter deferentially asked if he would object to sharing it. Royston took one look at the

person in question and decided he had no objections at all.

A mature woman — to put it kindly. Pearls, very probably genuine uncultured. Slipping real mink off her shoulders as she thanked him for being so courteous as to share the table. Her face was still quite pretty, but promisingly vapid, and made up with a kind of anxious thoroughness. Her clothes had cost a great deal and she hadn't been able to buy the talent needed to wear them successfully. In short, she had all the signs of the kind of woman he could tie round his finger.

He rose to her with the most dazzling smile he had achieved today, guided her through the restaurant's menu and chose a meal for her which was already flavored with flattery before it was served. He introduced himself; he steered the conversation around to travel, and improvised a story which put the recently-acquired tiger-skin to excellent use.

She didn't contribute much to the conversation, but what she did supply was music to him. Her name was Mrs. Arnheim; she was divorced from someone in plastics. She was wallowing in alimony; the divorce was more than the necessary year in the past, and she was lonely. Faced with a situation like this, Royston could hardly compare himself to a big game hunter. He felt more like the general

who was awoken by a frantic aide at two in the morning to be told that the country had been invaded, and who said, "Look in Drawer B," and went back to sleep.

He paid for her lunch; he never begrudged a small investment in a profitable undertaking.

When he was handing her into her cab afterwards, she laid a bejewelled hand on his arm, called him *dear* Mr. Royston, and looked several invitations at him. He leafed rapidly through a mental index, settled on dinner as a next step, and made a date.

That evening the phone rang several times. He let it ring. There was a man in black across the street, who stood for more than an hour clearly visible in the pool of brightness under a streetlamp before moving away.

HIS FIRST evening with Mrs. Arnheim was not the unqualified success he had expected. There was a man in black at the next table in the restaurant, sitting alone and eating with a kind of machine-like absent-mindedness. He had nothing in common with the other men in black, apart from his clothing and his impassive face, but that was hardly surprising. As Royston realized, this was the first time he had seen one of them do anything except stand and stare.

And it was his turn to do the staring. The man seemed unaware of his food. He seemed to be chewing to a regular count — so many movements of the jaw up and down, with a rhythm like a metronome, swallow, reload and chew again.

Royston caught himself. Looked at objectively, there was no evidence at all that the men in black were associated. There might be a thousand men in black suits on the street for him to be alarmed by. In any case, he had firmly resolved to steer clear of Lulabelle. If he stuck to that decision, he had nothing at all to worry about.

He snatched his attention back to Mrs. Arnheim, and had the biggest shock of his life when he discovered that she also was eating to a counted rhythm.

What *was* this? A revival of the health fad about chewing the food forty-three times, or whatever the number was? He could hardly ask such a personal question at this second meeting.

He fixed a date for a theater the following night, and took Mrs. Arnheim home in a mood even grimmer than yesterday's. When he got out of his own cab in front of his apartment a short time later, he was certain he would find another of the men in black somewhere nearby. He was right; the man was in the same place as last night

— in the full light of a street-lamp.

Abruptly his patience snapped. Telling the cabby to wait a moment, he strode over to the patient watcher.

And halted.

He hadn't been as right as he thought. This wasn't another of the men in black. It was the same one who had been in the restaurant an hour ago.

"Hey, you!" Royston snapped. "Are you following me around?"

The man stirred and half-turned to confront him. For one horrible instant, Royston had the impression that his face was melting, like wax in a flame; then he spoke, in a voice as expressionless as his features.

"Following you? You must be mistaken, sir."

And the face was not that of the man he had seen in the restaurant.

Royston felt his jaw drop. What was this — hallucinations? A trick of the light? Conscience deceiving him into thinking that any man wearing black was watching him? He thought of the word *paranoia* and muttered a frantic apology before going back, palms sweating, to pay off his cab.

When he looked around from the entrance of his apartment block, the man in black was nowhere to be seen. He had to take several stiff shots of brandy before he could sleep, and he

dreamed of being followed by black figures without faces.

THE NEXT day there were no men in black anywhere to be seen. Gradually he began to think of last night's shock as a mere effect of anxiety, which wouldn't recur. He cheered considerably, and his evening with Mrs. Arnheim was a roaring success in consequence. He wasn't sure until he had taken her home; she very seldom showed much expression because she was apparently unable to stop thinking about her elaborate makeup, but as he was seeing her to her door, she did crack a recognizable smile and ask if he wouldn't care to come in for a nightcap.

He would.

It was almost too pat. Her maid, she told him, had been instructed to go to bed, which made it easy for him to take charge, settle her on a sofa, and attend to the drinks. This gave him his first opportunity to appraise the furniture, the decoration and the ornaments. No doubt about it: this place spelled MONEY in letters of fire. Properly handled, Mrs. Arnheim could very well become a second Moira Parmester.

He found some light music on the radio, took his place beside her on the sofa, and plied her with his best line of late conversation. Compliments in abundance, naturally — mostly

on her taste in clothes and on the way she had done up the apartment. But also a judicious admixture of self-praise. He invented a brand-new story about a tiger, to kill which, he had disguised himself as a goat complete with its skin and horns, and it was so neatly framed he wished he had reserved the tiger-skin to go with it rather than with the story he had already told. In fact, it went so well in his own mind that he almost failed to notice the effect it was having on Mrs. Arnheim.

He broke off abruptly. She was looking distressed.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he exclaimed. "Does my story upset you?"

She gave a cautious nod.

"Oh, I'll change the subject! I'm talking too much about myself anyway — we ought really to be talking about you, and that's much more interesting. Tell me . . ."

And smoothly on, averting trouble.

When he fetched the second drink, he sat down again much closer on the sofa. She edged away fractionally, but he kept talking — pouring oil on the troubled woman, as he usually put it to himself — and within a short time she was accepting a light caress on the arm, the shoulder, a squeeze of the hand, a meaningful smile, and some exaggerated physical compli-

ments which drew a kind of wriggling response he hadn't expected to achieve before at least a month's acquaintance.

He tossed a mental coin, made a decision, and leaned forward to kiss her.

And Mrs. Arnheim howled.

THE RESULTS were swift and kaleidoscopic. For an instant he was petrified — he had never heard a sound like that from any human throat. Then there was a sound behind him, and he swung around on the sofa, thinking perhaps the maid had been awoken in the next room.

But the source of the noise wasn't in the next room. From a hiding-place behind the sofa, within arm's reach, a man in black was rising to his feet. Two men. Three men. And the faces of all three were identical blanks.

His head spun. He jumped up and stared from one to another of these impossible triplets. Mrs. Arnheim, who had jerked into an uncomfortable-looking position when she howled, moved not a muscle; she might have been a corpse.

Then the face of the man in the middle of the trio changed, as it had changed last night, more quickly. Now he could see the process taking place, it was unutterably horrible. The very bones beneath the flesh seemed to writhe and deform,

and took on the semblance of the man who had denied following him.

The thread of Royston's self-control snapped. He launched himself at the man with the plastic face; his fist, backed by his whole hard-muscled body, slammed home on the point of the jaw.

And *bounced*.

That wasn't human flesh he had felt; it was more like rubber.

He swayed on his feet, the truth forming hideously in his mind. The three men in black, no longer identical, returned his stare stonily.

"Aggressive, isn't he?" said the one whose face had altered. "I thought you might care to see his reaction to what I did. Why did you call for help, Jeef?" It sounded like Jeef?

"I lost my head, Kronze," said Mrs. Arnheim, stirring at last. "I thought he was going to bite me."

This was nightmare! Royston made a wild charge towards the door, determined not to stay in this room of lunatics.

Without seeming to hurry, Kronze was there ahead of him. Royston's fists swung and battered at the rubbery flesh, leaving no mark and having no effect. His vision began to blur, and whimpers escaped his slack lips.

"I think this is an exceptionally good specimen, Gruk," said

Kronze, not seeming to notice the flailing blows raining on him. The two other men conferred for a moment in low tones.

Then Gruk spoke up. "He looks very suitable," he agreed. "Quiet him, will you? And try not to damage the skin more than you can help."

The familiar phrase lanced through the mists in Royston's mind. *Try not to damage the skin* — why, that meant . . .

Kronze's hands flashed out and pinioned his arms. He felt himself lifted effortlessly from the floor and turned around. He wished wholeheartedly that he had not been turned, for now he could see that Mrs. Arnheim . . .

The stalking horse which he had called Mrs. Arnheim, had rolled on its face on the floor and split up the back, and the hunter now emerging, was definitely not human. It was — it was . . .

Royston screamed. After a moment, he had to stop in order to be sick. Through ringing in his ears, he heard Kronze speak with professional enthusiasm.

"Wily beast, this. Did you hear the story he was telling Jeef about disguising himself as a goat to decoy a tiger? I thought for one moment he was on to us — I really did!"

"So did I," Jeef agreed, pushing aside the slack form of Mrs.

Arnheim. "Are you going to preserve him now?"

"Yes, do that," instructed the one called Gruk. "We can't possibly feed it on the voyage home."

Royston tried vainly to drown out the terrible words with another scream. He kept on —

and on — until he felt Kronze's efficient imitation hands begin the business of turning him from a man into a museum piece.

The last thing he ever heard was the musing voice of the hunter saying something about the biggest game of all.

The Reckoning

The very first ballot we received expressed approval of the cover and tied Lovecraft with Quinn for first place. With the second ballot, Bloch moved into first place, and this position held for some weeks, until the winner finally tied with him, then went ahead, staying ahead until the polls closed. Only two ballots expressed dislike of the cover.

Here is the way the contents finally came out: (1) *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*, by Seabury Quinn; (2) *The Lurking Fear*, by H. P. Lovecraft; (3) *House of the Hatched*, by Robert Bloch; (4) *Village of the Dead*, by Edward D. Hoch; (5) *The Off-Season*, by Gerald W. Page; (6) *The Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe; (7) *The Awful Injustice*, by S. B. H. Hurst; (8) *Ferguson's Capsules*, by August Derleth.

Here is how we score your ballots. There were 8 stories in the issue, so if you rated them from 1 to 8, that was the score which was entered on our sheet. If you considered a story outstanding, and marked it "0" then a zero went down on our sheet and the story you liked next best was given a "1" and so on. If you disliked a story and marked it "X" then we scored in "9" on our sheet. The lowest score designated the winner, who had a very substantial lead.

Jules de Grandin tied with HPL in the number of "0"s received, but no one disliked the Quinn novelet, while one reader did express dislike for *The Lurking Fear*. But Lovecraft was much less controversial this time than usual — heretofore the "X"s have nearly balanced the "0"s, when we ran him in **MAGAZINE OF HORROR**.

Edgar Allan Poe was also less controversial than we expected; two of you disliked the story and wanted to know *why* we publish EAP at all — but four placed the story in first place and asked for more material by the old masters.

The Strange Case Of Pascal

by Roger Eugene Ulmer

MY NAME IS David Pascal; profession, doctor of medicine. As a young man, I held an enviable reputation in my chosen field, and was credited with the virtues of ordinary respectability, a law-abiding nature, and abhorrence of the brutal. I was an average citizen.

At the time of which I write, I had a partner, Blenheim, by name, a man of singular per-

sonality, intelligence, capability, and, when I first met him, of most charming character. His countenance, however, filled me with a nameless fear and disgust. Its features were bloated and leering. This I could well afford to forget, in view of his splendid capacities, and I prided myself upon affiliating with such a fellow; but it was not long before he developed

... and the human face on the monster was
the face of his deadly enemy, Blenheim ...

into a most skillful criminal who involved me in a net of shady operations, conducted by him in my name and over my signature, of which I was wholly unaware and entirely innocent. I will not go into details, for they are of no significance, but suffice it to say, when I finally came to my senses I was forced into silence in order to save my name from utter ruin. Had I been wise, I would not have delayed the inevitable. Blenheim slowly absorbed my interests, and I became a figure-head; with each passing day I sank deeper into the mire, until in my own eyes I was a convicted criminal. More than once, I resolved to denounce him, but fear of the terrible cost always restrained me.

All this I might have suffered to the grave; but when Blenheim poisoned against me the mind of the girl I loved and had resolved to wed, and stole her affection, I rebelled. Grieved and desperate, I rushed upon him one day and publicly denounced him, while he stood by in smiling contempt, with Margaret clinging to his arm, regarding me in cold disdain.

In a few days, Blenheim brought forth incriminating documents and other evidence, signed by myself. The result was that I was tried, found guilty, and sent to prison for fraud. I came out broken in health, embittered, but determined to

avenge myself by finding Blenheim, if he yet lived, and forcing him to public confession of his guilt and my innocence.

During my incarceration, Blenheim's face had obsessed me; waking and sleeping, I beheld his repellent features.

When again I saw Blenheim, (he was easily found, as his name was widely spoken), he was established in luxurious quarters, surrounded by all material evidence of the respect and favor that had once been mine. Margaret, his wife, was now like a rose that had withered.

I FORCED my way past protesting clerks into Blenheim's private sanctum and stood silently in the doorway, watching him at his desk. He had not changed; still crafty, leering, as always, though his hair was slightly tinged with silver.

"Well?" he demanded curtly, swinging around, and glancing up at my general ill-facored aspect.

I approached him. "You don't know me, Blenheim?"

He peered earnestly into my eyes for a few seconds, and then I saw him start and turn pale. "Pascal!"

"Yes," I echoed grimly. "Pascal."

Then I warned him, promised that I would have vengeance for the wrongs he had done me, that he had best enjoy his pros-

perity while he might, and left him, a somewhat shaken man; but his natural boldness soon restored him, I am sure.

That night, lost in visions and plans of revenge, I retired, seeing as usual my old partner's leering face before me; but I could not sleep, and began to pace the floor in a state of great agitation. Tiring at length, I sank wearily into a chair, while my senses slowly slipped away from me; the room, I myself, seemed unreal, as if viewed from a distance by my detached self, and a queer mist obscured my mental faculties. I nodded sleepily, my eyes drooped heavily, and closed; and the only impression I carried into unconsciousness was a vivid, unforgettable one — the face of Louis Blenheim.

THE CHAIR seemed to have fallen silently away from me, and I hung suspended and alone in the silence, darkness and loneliness of infinity, the only living thing in that black void, supported by I know not what strange influence that prevented my crashing into bottomless depths; but, while waiting, I became conscious of a subtle presence, unseen, unheard, but growing more tangible each moment, until the darkness in front of me was relieved by a ghostly, phosphorescent glow that emanated from a monstrous structure whose exact na-

ture I could not determine. Growing more distinct, it developed into a colossal web, octagonal in shape, the wings and fibers of which were lost in the all-enveloping gloom, and so vast that they seemed to fill the universal void. Its clinging, silken threads vibrated as if stirred softly to and fro by some agitation of the atmosphere, unfelt by me, fascinating yet filling my soul with terror. In the grip of the unnamable attraction toward the heart of the web, its filaments seemed hungry to receive me, and slowly, but irresistibly, I was pulled forward, struggling with all my bodily and mental powers; nothing availed and, as if impatient with my reluctance, the vast web began to glide toward me, growing more overwhelming the nearer it drew, until I felt as an ant before an elephant — utterly impotent, pitifully infinitesimal, at the mercy of overpowering force. A sense of suffocation developed; my struggles were renewed, and I cried out; but my utterances sounded weak in that infinitude out of which had come this colossal fancy. Straight to its heart I was drawn, until the web loomed before me, vast, unfathomable, filled with invisible horrors and a fate I could not divine. In a breathless rush, while I cried and frantically fought its fascination, I hurtled through the in-

tervening space and into the web, which then, with every clinging fiber, began to close upon me, entwining my arms and legs, choking my cries, stealing my breath, paralyzing every muscle in my body.

I battled impotently against my doom. The soft, silken film clung tenaciously to my fingers; I was enveloped in a shroud of the gauzy stuff, until lips, eyes and nose were buried; it matted upon my hair and throttled my breath; but I was able still to see, though dimly, and realize what was occurring; and with mortal horror I beheld layer upon layer, sheet upon sheet of that endless web fold themselves about me remorselessly, silently, until I was helpless, unable to utter even the slightest sound; but I wondered vaguely what would next occur, and why the demon of this mighty trap did not come running out upon its binding strands and with poisonous tentacles cover my body with its repulsive self, and bear me away to its hidden lair of dread. At the thought I shivered anew and agony's perspiration trickled from my brow, for I was convinced that each succeeding instant would be my last, and breathing was accomplished with the greatest torture. I lay entirely blanketed in a shroud of gossamer fiber from which there was no escape; but still the dreaded monster did not

appear, though my soul was alive to the ever-present fear of its advent. Was I to die thus, a prisoner in this fantastic trap of horror, slowly, with maddening torture?

A sudden rushing roar, beating against my muffled ears, answered the unspoken thought, and with a terrifying swoop, the entire monstrous web engulfed me. A feeble attempt to scream was choked in my throat; my struggles ceased as I succumbed and lay still.

Then, a new sensation; a vibration upon the strands, and looking up I beheld what I dreaded most — a monstrous spider, at least six feet long and three high, gliding swiftly over the network of his trap. A horrid creature with fat and bloated body, covered with stiff black spines, and legs long, powerful, and patched over with a scrawny layer of black down. In places the glistening hide was exposed, and as the thing drew nearer I saw that it exuded a gummy fluid of pronounced sulfuric odor, covering the beast from head to foot and clinging to the fibers of the web in glittering globules. The head was huge, but more horrible because I perceived, with a thrill of revulsion, that it was a human head.

THE FEATURES of the countenance were almost livid, in stark contrast to the jet of

its body; and the face was that of Louis Blenheim, infinitely more repulsive than in life. Two long fangs hung from the drooling mouth, through which was shot the deadly venom of its bite; and the great eyes, protruding and yellow, glared on me.

The thing drew nearer, and I reeled from its stench, while its breath fanned my cheek hotly, the fangs glistening in its foul mouth, gaunt claws expanding and contracting like those of a cat, while the body seemed to pulsate and swell to twice its bloated size before my revolted gaze. The creature was upon me, covering my own with its vile bulk, crushing out my life and settling searching fangs in my flesh; but when the gleaming eyes came so close to mine, and I felt the sticky fluid oozing from the monster on to my own skin, quivered under the cutting pain of that bite, and revolted at the touch of the clammy brute, I renewed all my struggles with tenfold vigor. Visions of being dragged away to the monster's abysmal den, there to be feasted upon, flashed before me. The face was grinning, and with a superhuman effort, I dragged weighted hands from the mesh of gossamer and buried their fingers in the slimy body, shuddering; but my efforts were as the breaking of a ripple against a mighty sea-wall, and in the end I fell back pant-

ing, exhausted, and was carried swiftly over the web, to the den's opening.

There the spider paused to take firmer hold upon my body; but as it halted, I gazed into the black depths of the awful threshold before me and instantly trembled with unspeakable terror. My mind flew to the knife I always carried, and I prayed that I might grip the blade; suddenly, to my unspeakable joy, I beheld the weapon in my hand. Whence it came, I knew not. It was there, my one hope of deliverance. I wrenched an arm free from the momentarily relaxed grip of a talon and dragged the steel upward.

Swollen fingers gripped the hilt, and a leaden arm swung the knife. With a snakelike hiss, the monster turned and I felt again the sting of its foul fangs. Once, twice, thrice I struck, burying the steel in the hairy body. In those few anguished moments I lived through ages, blindly cutting, slashing, tearing madly, while with each fresh wound I inflicted, a spurt of the nauseating fluid would cover and almost strangle me; but I fought on and on. Agonized rage distorted the features of the man-spider, and my hate of Blenheim rose to superhuman heights. Another bite of venomous fangs and I cried; but continued to plunge my sticky and dripping knife into the bloated beast. With each in-

cision of its teeth, I felt a rending pull within, leaving me weakened and gasping; but I battled to the last, covering the monster with ragged, gaping wounds. At last I sang with fierce triumph, for the death-wound had been inflicted; but how short-lived was my triumph! Of what avail the struggle of man in death's grip? I, too, was surrendering to the inevitable; but my failing arm made a final swoop, and then — annihilation.

My last impression was of Blenheim. My last impression was of Blenheim's face, with spider's body, gloating over my dead form.

MY DREAM ended abruptly, vividly, and I awoke to find the morning well advanced and daylight streaming in through my window. I leaped to my feet with a vast sigh of relief from that mental experience, but determined to seek Blenheim and a settlement that very morning.

As I hurried from the house,

a newsboy's cry halted me. Some instinct, I know not what, prompted me to purchase a paper. The next moment I was gazing spellbound at the flaring headlines:

LOUIS BLENHEIM MURDERED

Following is an excerpt from the account:

"... and Blenheim was found dead in bed early this morning, after his family had heard cries of distress and sounds of a violent struggle in his room. The body was bleeding from numerous dagger wounds. No clue to the murderer has been found, but there are several inexplicable circumstances surrounding the tragedy that color it with an element of the supernatural. The deceased was covered by a strange gummy fluid which exuded a pronounced sulfuric odor, while in another part of the room were found what appeared to be remnants of a great web, some of which were clinging to the body."



... thru SOLID WALLS

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The Witch Is Dead

by Edward D. Hoch

(author of *Village of the Dead*)

HER REAL name was Helen Marie Carrio, but for more years than anyone could remember she'd been known simply as Mother Fortune. She was a large, plump woman, somewhere near seventy years old, though she might easily have passed for a hundred.

As her name might have implied, Mother Fortune made her meagre living by predicting the future, by peering into a mammoth crystal ball and tell-

ing you just what you wanted to hear about yourself. It was a dying profession — especially in Westchester County in the second decade of the Atomic Age — but there were still many to whom her word was almost sacred.

There were others, however, who had widely different views on the subject of Mother Fortune. There were some, in fact, who even accused her of being a modern day witch.

Suddenly the woman had burst into flames and
was consumed.

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And perhaps she was.

In any event, Mother Fortune died as all good witches must — in a burst of flames that would have brought cries of envy from the judges of centuries ago.

It was perhaps one of the paradoxes of life, though, that Mother Fortune's death was to prove even more fantastic than had her life . . .

IT WAS the first week in October, and the twelfth day of an early Fall heat wave that had amazed both forecasters and suburbanites by sending the temperatures into the high eighties. I had taken the 5:12 train from New York, as I usually did on nights when things weren't too busy at the office.

Actually, I suppose I noticed the man in the seat ahead of me right from the very start; but it wasn't until he left the train with me at Hudsonville that I actually caught a glimpse of his face. It had been a long time since I'd seen him, but that heavyset, wrinkled, yet somehow handsome, face was one you didn't forget easily.

I caught up with him in front of the tiny building that served to link Hudsonville with the New Haven Railroad, and asked him, "You're Simon Ark, aren't you?"

The smile came at once to his tight lips. "Of course. It has been some years . . ."

It had been around 1950. I'd first met Simon Ark in a little western mining town years before, when I was still a newspaper reporter. I hadn't seen him since; but since he was probably the most unusual man I'd ever know, I wasn't likely to forget him.

I led him to a coffee shop across the street, and over two steaming cups of black coffee I told him of my life during recent years. "I'm with Neptune Books now," I said; "one of these paperbound book publishers. Been there about three years now. It's a lot better than chasing politicians and police cars for a living. I married Shelly Constance, you know."

"I'd heard," Simon Ark said. "It's quite good to see you again."

"You certainly don't look any older, Simon. What have you been doing with yourself?"

Simon Ark smiled again. "The usual things. I've been traveling mostly. To England, and other places."

"I hope things weren't as bad as in Gidaz."

"Sometimes they were worse," he replied, and the smile was no longer on his lips. "There is evil everywhere these days, and it is most difficult to separate the man-made evil from the more ancient type . . ."

I'D FORMED many theories about Simon Ark since our

brief encounter several years back, but I could see that I was still a long way from knowing the truth about him. He'd told me once that he was searching, searching for the ultimate evil, searching for the devil himself. And there were times when the look of his face seemed to tell me that he'd been searching a long, long time.

I lit a cigaret and sipped my coffee: "Well what on Earth are you doing up in Westchester, anyway? The most evil things up here are the commuters' trains and this current heat wave."

He frowned slightly at that. "You perhaps have not heard then about the remarkable events at the Hudsonville College for Women, or about the old woman who calls herself Mother Fortune."

"I guess I haven't. Maybe I don't want to, if they're the kind of thing to bring *you* to Hudsonville."

"I hope that I am in time to prevent anything really serious," he said, "but it is hard to say just yet."

"What is it that's happening, anyway?"

"Of course there hasn't been any public announcement of it as yet — and there probably won't be — but it seems that this woman named Mother Fortune fancies herself as something of a modern day witch. In any event, she has cast a

spell of some kind over the girl students of Hudsonville College."

I had to laugh at that. The whole idea of a witch invading a modern girls' college was too much for me. "You're not serious, certainly?"

"I fear that I am," he told me. "Three of the girls are apparently near death, and some forty others have become ill."

"Then there must be some other explanation," I was quick to insist. "Things like that just don't happen any more, at least not around Hudsonville."

"Stranger things than that have happened in this world," Simon Ark replied. "I'm going out to the school now. You may accompany me if you wish . . ."

HUDSONVILLE College for Women was like no other institute of higher learning anywhere in the East. Sixty years of traditions, plus millions of dollars from a few lucky endowments, had made it possible to recreate in Westchester some of the great wonders of ancient Rome.

At the very entrance to the campus was a line of pillars suggesting the remains of Apollo's temple at Pompeii, and even the students' chapel was an exact duplicate, in miniature, of the Church of San Francisco at Assisi. The main road through the campus was called, appropriately enough,

the Appian Way. And the huge assembly hall, which could never be filled by Hudsonville's moderate enrollment, was of course patterned on the Roman Forum. There was even a small bridge over a creek that bore a remarkable resemblance to Venice's Rialto Bridge.

The whole thing was like taking a tour of all of Italy in a little over an hour; but whether it actually contributed to the task of turning out modern cultured young ladies prepared for business and marriage was something I didn't know. I suppose it did, however, attract a certain number of students whose mothers would otherwise have sent them up to Vassar or over to Bryn Mawr; and it had the distinction of getting regular picture stories in all the leading magazines by the simple method of staging annual pageants based on some forgotten lore of ancient Rome.

It was apparently Simon Ark's first glimpse of the unusual campus, for he spent some minutes strolling around aimlessly before we finally headed for the administration building, which oddly enough was the only one that failed to carry out the old Roman motif. Instead, it was an ancient limestone structure that apparently dated from the college's founding back in the mid-nineties, and had somehow survived the

Romanizing of the remainder of the college.

I'd called Shelly to tell her I'd be late for supper, though I didn't really expect the trip to Hudsonville College to last too long. And I was still quite dubious about the whole thing when we were met at the door by a tall, scholarly-looking gentleman with a Roman nose that fitted in well with the rest of the campus.

"May I help you?" he asked quietly, and though his voice was polite I noticed that he was carefully blocking the doorway and barring our way.

"Possibly. I am Simon Ark, and this is a friend of mine. I heard that you have had some trouble here, and I thought I might be able to offer some assistance . . ."

"We already have a doctor . . ." the tall man began.

"I'm not a doctor."

"If you're a newspaper reporter or anything like that, I can tell you right now we've nothing to say."

Simon Ark grunted. "I'm not a reporter, either; but before I say any more, could you tell us who you are?"

"Sorry," the man said, smiling slightly. "Name's Hugh Westwood. I'm professor of ancient history here. Now, if you could tell me your business . . ."

"We . . . happened to hear about your troubles here, Pro-

fessor Westwood. I personally specialize in the investigation of such phenomena, and I thought I might be of some little assistance."

Westwood gazed at Simon Ark with searching eyes. "I don't know how you found out about it, but if you mean you've experience in dealing with witches, you're certainly the man we want to see."

"Well . . ." Simon Ark hesitated a moment, "I have had some small experiences with witches . . ."

THAT WAS ALL Westwood needed to hear. He led us down a long hall to his office and motioned to two chairs. In a few moments he rejoined us with an older, white-haired man and a middle-aged woman.

"This is our president, Doctor Lampton, and the Dean of Women, Miss Bagly. You said your name was . . . Simon Ark?"

He nodded and introduced me as his assistant. I was amazed at how quickly he seemed to be accepted by these three frightened people. Perhaps it was their fear, coupled with Ark's compelling manner, that made them forget their aversion to publicity.

"It's this woman . . . this . . . this Mother Fortune," Miss Bagly began. "She's some kind of a witch, and she's put a spell over our girls. We . . . we don't

know which way to turn, Mr. Ark; we really don't. If we reported something like this to the police, it would get into all the papers and our school would be ruined."

Simon Ark frowned, and I knew a question was coming. "But I understand that at least a few of these girls are extremely ill. You mean to say they aren't even receiving medical attention?"

"Oh, heavens," Miss Bagly exclaimed, "Dr. Lampton here is a real M.D., you know. He's been looking after them."

"That's correct," the doctor said. "I haven't had any private practice in a good many years, ever since I became president of Hudsonville, but I still know enough to give those girls proper attention."

"Then just what's wrong with them, Doctor?" Simon Ark asked.

"Well . . . by medical standards it's very difficult to say. They just seem . . . well, weak, without energy. Several girls have fainted, and one or two are in a mild coma of some sort."

"I imagine you've thought of narcotics."

"Certainly. There's no possibility of anything like that — not at Hudsonville!"

Simon Ark sighed. "I understand there have been letters . . ."

I knew better than to wonder how he knew about the

leters, because Simon Ark had ways of finding out such things. Doctor Lampton nodded and pulled them from his pocket. They looked as if he'd been carrying them and studying them for weeks.

There were three of them in all, dated about a week apart and starting three weeks previous, around the first day of the Fall term. The writing was crude, intentionally crude, I thought. All three letters were identical in their wording: "*To the president of Hudsonville College: Your cruel act of fifty years ago is at last avenged. I have cursed your school and every student in it. Before another moon has come your school will be a campus of the dead*" The notes were signed "*Mother Fortune.*"

Simon Ark studied them carefully. "This Mother Fortune is a local gypsy fortune teller, I understand. Do you have any idea just why she should be putting a curse on the college?"

Professor Westwood, who'd remained silent for some time, joined in the conversation then. "Unfortunately, yes. That reference to fifty years ago sent us looking back through the school's old records, but we found it. The woman who calls herself Mother Fortune was once a student here . . ."

This news made it a little easier for me to understand

their reluctance to call in the police. It was bad enough to have an exclusive girls' college hexed by a witch, but when it turns out the witch was once a student at the school, that's even worse publicity.

" . . . Her name was Helen Marie Carrio at that time," Westwood continued. "We found from the records that she was expelled just two weeks before she was to have graduated."

"For what reason?" Simon Ark asked.

DOCTOR LAMPTON interrupted to answer. "You have to remember that this was fifty years ago, Mister Ark. Many things were different then."

"Why was she expelled?" Ark repeated.

"For smoking cigarets," Lampton replied weakly. "You must realize that at the time such a thing was unknown among young girls, and at a school like Hudsonville it would have been a most serious offense."

We were silent for a moment while we thought about it. Was it possible that such a girl, grown old fifty years later, should still remember this childhood tragedy? Was it possible that the old woman now known as Mother Fortune somehow had the power to strike down these young girls.

"Have you contacted Mother

Fortune about these threats?" Simon Ark asked.

"I went to see her personally," Doctor Lampton said. "Two weeks ago. She admitted sending the notes, and said she'd keep on sending them. She's a very odd woman indeed — half-insane, possibly — yet with a maner about her that almost makes you believe she is some sort of . . . witch." The last word was spoken very quietly, as if the president was afraid someone outside the room might be listening.

Simon Ark frowned once again. "There have been witches in this world, and quite possibly Mother Fortune is one; but it is too early to say for certain. Right now I'd like to see some of these girls who have suffered this odd sickness. Oh, and I'd like a list of their names if possible."

Professor Westwood nodded and pulled a pad of yellow lined paper from his desk. The top sheet was covered with the usual unintelligible notes of a history professor, phrases like "*Tunica Molesta*", and "*Plato-IX-Jowett*". Westwood tore off the top sheet and began copying names from a typed list on his desk.

There were some forty-odd names on the list, ranging from Abbot, Mary to Yeagen, Bernice. Some had grim-looking stars after them, and I figured correctly that these were the

more serious cases. Simon Ark carefully folded the yellow list and we followed the three others out of Westwood's office.

They led us across the mildly rolling hills of the campus, past the ancient Roman columns, to a squat, three-storey structure, "This is Venice Hall, the principal girls' dorm," Miss Bagly informed us. "All our dorms are named after Italian cities."

We followed her in, amidst a few questioning stares from casually dressed girls relaxing after supper. I gathered that the sick girls were simply being kept in their own rooms.

THE FIRST room we visited was a cheerful looking one on the second floor. There were two girls in it, both of them in bed. One was sitting up and reading a thick historical novel, but the other was asleep.

Simon Ark examined them both with care, but except for a somewhat tired-out expression there was nothing unusual about them. "When did you first begin to feel ill?" Ark inquired.

The girl sat up further in bed, revealing a fantastic pair of plaid pajamas. "Gosh, I don't know. About a week ago, I guess."

"Did you receive any burns or unusual injuries around that time?"

"No, nothing."

"Do you smoke?"

"Sometimes. Not too much."

"Have you had a cigaret recently?"

"Not in over a month; not since I was back home."

I could see that Simon Ark was mildly disappointed at this. He apparently had thought that the perfect weapon of Mother Fortune's revenge would be poisoned cigarets of some kind. But such was not the case.

The other girl had awakened now, and I could see that she was in much worse shape. I think it gave us all an odd feeling, looking at those girls, realizing that they might be the innocent victims of a terror that couldn't happen, but was.

Later, when we left the room and the building, Simon Ark appeared deep in thought, Simon Ark appeared deep in thought. Once he turned to Professor Westwood and asked, "Have any teachers shown signs of this . . . sickness?"

"No, just the students."

"And what symptoms have the more serious cases shown?"

"Oh . . . vomiting . . . partial paralysis of various muscles . . ."

Simon Ark frowned. "Has anyone taken a blood test of the sick girls?"

"Why . . . no, I hardly think so. That would involve calling in the authorities."

"Perhaps you could do it in your own lab. At least I suggest that a blood test of some sort

be made as soon as possible."

We left them shortly after that, and Simon Ark and I made our way across the now darkened campus to the street. Even with the night upon us, the heat was still there, making us forget the fact that it was already early autumn.

"What do you think about it, Simon?" I asked after we had walked some distance.

Simon Ark gazed off into the night, and I thought for a moment he hadn't heard my question. But then gradually he turned to me. "I think that we should pay a visit to Mother Fortune . . ."

WE FOUND her, later that night, in a little street in a little city not too far from Hudsonville College. It was just another city in the southern part of the county called Westchester. And the street, usually, was just another street.

But tonight it was different. Tonight it blazed with light, light from a thousand colored bulbs that spelled out a score of gay designs against the evening sky. From every direction lighted streets shot out from the large old church at their center, the church of St. Francis of Assisi.

"It's a celebration for the saint's feast day," I explained to Simon. "These old Italian churches go big for things like that. The thing is sort of one huge

block party that lasts for three or four nights. You certainly don't expect to find Mother Fortune here, do you."

"I never expect to find evil anywhere," Simon Ark replied, "and yet it is all around us. This poor church, I fear, is no exception."

We walked on, beneath the colored lights and past the booths and trucks and wagons, selling everything from religious statues to hot pizza. Presently we saw a short, fat priest moving among the crowd.

Simon Ark moved quickly through the crowd and caught the priest's arm. "Pardon, Father, but I seek information regarding a woman known as Mother Fortune. I believe she is near here."

The little priest's face turned dark. "Sir, if you seek her out I hope it is to force her to move away from my church and my people. She came two days ago, with her trailer and her crystal ball and her fortune telling. My people — many of them — are simple superstitious Italians, not long in this country."

Simon Ark frowned. "But don't you have any control over who takes part in your celebration?"

"Ah, no." The priest shrugged. "They even come here and sell meat to my people on Fridays. But there are regulations about trailers in Westchester County, as you know, and perhaps the

police will force Mother Fortune to leave."

As we'd talked, he had led us to the very end of the lighted area, and there, parked against the curb like some giant sleeping beetle, was a long house trailer with the name of Mother Fortune on its side.

The priest left us, fading into the bright lights at our backs, leaving us alone with the woman who was perhaps a witch. The trailer was a large silver one, and in addition to Mother Fortune's name I noticed the single word "*Erebus*" near the front of the vehicle, like the name on the prow of a ship.

"What kind of a bus is that?" I asked Simon.

He smiled slightly. "*Erebus* was one of the names for hell used by the poet Milton. A fitting name for the home of a witch."

THERE WAS no one down at that end of the street at all, and I imagined correctly that the little priest's campaign against Mother Fortune was meeting with much success. Simon Ark pressed a tiny button by the trailer door and we waited for it to open.

When it finally did, the woman who greeted us was a surprise. I didn't know just what I expected, and certainly Mother Fortune was no beauty, but neither was the typical concept of a medieval witch. She was

simply a very old white-haired woman, who acted as if she might be a little drunk and probably was.

"What you want?" she managed to mumble.

"My name is Simon Ark; I'd like to talk to you."

"Want your fortune told?"

"Possibly."

"Come in, then."

We entered the gleaming silver trailer and found ourselves in another world. I'd expected something unusual, but I hadn't been prepared for the ancient beaded drapes, the musty oriental furnishings, and huge glowing crystal ball that filled the center of the trailer's main room.

The crystal ball, apparently lit by a bulb in its base, was a good three feet in diameter, and the way it gave off illumination reminded me of those big revolving glass globes they used to have in dance halls twenty years ago.

Simon Ark settled himself in one of the big overstuffed chairs with curling dragons for arms and said, "I want to talk about the trouble at Hudsonville College."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the old woman was on her feet, shouting in a harsh voice that was almost a scream. "They've been here themselves. I already told them it would do no good. It's too late to stop me now. Too late, you hear? Too late! They can

have me arrested if they want, but it will do no good. Before many moons have passed, the first of the girls will be dead! After that the rest will die quickly. They'll regret the day they expelled Mother Fortune from their school!"

From the cigaret burns on the sleeve of her robe, it was obvious that she still had the habit that had led to her disgrace those many years before. In a way I felt sorry for this old woman whose aging brain had turned back fifty years of revenge.

"Helen," Simon Ark began, but the woman showed no emotion at the use of her real name. "Helen, you've got to stop all this foolishness. You're not a witch and you haven't put a curse on those girls."

"Haven't I?" she laughed shrilly. "Haven't I? Look at this!"

She opened a drawer and pulled out a thin book with heavily padded covers that I recognized as the yearbook of Hudsonville College. Several long black hatpins had been driven through the covers and the pages.

The sight of it was so incredulous that I would have laughed had I not remembered those girls I'd seen back at the college. Something had made them sick, and perhaps this was it. I'd learned a long time ago, at my first meeting with Simon

Ark, that there are things in this world beyond our powers of explanation.

She placed the book on a table and gazed into the huge crystal ball. "Back in the Middle Ages it was believed that tobacco was invented by the devil, and that only the devil's priests used it," she said. "When they threw me out of Hudsonville, I began to believe it."

I turned my face from her as she talked, unable to look at the lines of tragedy I saw there. What had happened during fifty years of heartbreak to turn this one-time college girl into a vengeful witch? That was something I never found out, and something that is perhaps better left unknown.

At length she fell silent, and I could see that Simon Ark would learn nothing more from her. "Get out of here now," she said with finality. "I have to change my robe and get ready for the evening business." She gestured toward the wall, where a glistening gold and purple garment decorated with blazing suns and hal-moons hung from a hook.

Of course there would be no more customers for her fortunes this late at night, but she didn't seem to realize it. In her vague way, night and day had apparently merged into one.

We left her then, and walked back through the lighted streets to the church of Saint Francis

of Assisi. And when I looked at Simon Ark's face in the light of the multi-colored bulbs, I knew that neither one of us was certain whether we had just left a modern-day servant of Satan or simply a confused old woman . . .

THE FOLLOWING morning dawned hot and bright, with the sun beating down upon leaves and grass that waited in vain for the cool slumber of autumn. It was Saturday, and I spent the morning working around the house. Shelly was an avid listener to my account of the previous night's adventures, but by noon I had all but forgotten Simon Ark and Mother Fortune.

It was just after the church bells had sounded the mid-day hour in the distance that Shelly called to me. "Someone wants you on the telephone."

I dropped the garden hose I'd been using and went into the house. The voice on the phone was familiar at once, but it took me a moment to identify Simon Ark on the other end.

"The witch is dead," he said simply. "Would you like to meet me at the trailer?"

"I'll be right over."

With a shouted few words to Shelly, I jumped into my car and headed south toward the parish of Saint Francis of Assisi. In those first few minutes I didn't even try to think of the meaning of Simon Ark's words. I only knew

that something had happened, something strange and unknown.

To the west dark clouds were forming on the horizon, and the shiver that went down my spine told me the barometer was falling fast. The October heat wave was on its last legs.

In the distance I thought I heard the rumble of thunder . . .

THE STREET by the church, which last night had been a brightly lighted invitation to fun and merriment, was now dark with the threat of approaching rain. It was blocked off completely by nearly a dozen police and private cars, and additional policemen were busy keeping back the crowd of curious neighbors. Some seemed almost indignant that they should be kept from seeing this bit of drama that had been played out on their street. Others simply stood silently, aware that they were in the presence of death.

Simon Ark stood in the door of the trailer, and he signaled to the police to let me through. I had long ago stopped wondering about his strange power over people, and now it seemed only natural that he was already in the confidence of the police.

"Prepare yourself," he told me at the door; "it's not a pleasant sight."

And it wasn't.

It reminded me of a time, a lifetime ago, when we'd had to blast a Japanese machine-gun

nest on a lonely Pacific isle. We'd used flame throwers, and the bodies of the Japanese, came back to my memory now as I stared at the thing that had been Mother Fortune.

She lay on top of her giant crystal ball, with her arms hanging down limply almost to the floor. Her clothes had been burnt off her completely, and the withered flesh was black and scorched. Her hair, and much of the skin on her face, had been burnt away, but there was no doubt in my mind that it really was the body of the woman we'd talked to last night.

"What happened?" I asked finally.

Simon Ark continued gazing at the body as he answered. "The police came to tell her she'd have to move the trailer. They looked through the window and saw her like this." He paused a moment before continuing. "The trailer was locked. They had to force the door to get in."

"What started the fire?"

"The police don't know. Even the priest doesn't know. They think it might have been something . . . unnatural."

For the first time I realized that the trailer itself was virtually unmarked by the fire; the blaze apparently had been centered on the body of the woman.

"Do you think somebody killed her, burned her because she was

a witch, like they did in Salem?"

"Nobody burned her to death because she was alone in a locked trailer at the time," Simon Ark replied. "And at Salem they *hanged* the witches — they hanged nineteen and pressed one to death. I know."

And when he said it I knew that he really did know. He knew because he'd been there and seen it, just as I could tell that he'd seen something like this horror before, somewhere in the dark forgotten past of history.

The police were busy removing the body, and examining the crystal ball for some sign of the fire's origin. But of course they found nothing.

As he left the trailer I saw the priest from St. Francis of Assisi Church making the sign of the cross over the body, and I wondered how this man could bless the corpse of a woman who'd opposed him so just a few hours earlier, when she still lived. I was even more astonished when I saw Simon Ark take an odd-looking cross from his pocket and raise it for a second over the body.

As he walked away he mumbled something in a tongue I didn't understand. He'd told me once it was Coptic, and I suspected it was a prayer, a very old prayer from the dawn of civilization.

And then the rain began to fall, in great wet drops that brought wisps of steam from the dry hot pavement. Simon Ark followed me to my car, and we sat in the rain watching the morgue wagon pull slowly away with the body of Mother Fortune . . .

"DID YOU ever hear of Charles Fort?" Simon Ark asked me some time later, as we sipped a glass of wine in an almost deserted oak-lined cocktail lounge. "He was a writer of some twenty-five years back who collected odd and unexplained news reports. His writings contain several references to deaths by mysterious burns."

I'd heard of Fort, of course, but I wasn't familiar with his writings. Simon Ark counted them off on his fingers as he mentioned the odd deaths. "There was one in Blyth, England, about fifty years ago. An old woman in a locked house, burned to death on a sofa. And in Ayer, Massachusetts, in 1890 — a woman burned to death in the woods. In London, Southampton, Liverpool — always women, always old women. Fort reports only one case of an old man burning to death mysteriously. You want more cases, closer to home? St. Louis in 1889, North Carolina, San Diego . . . A similar case in Rochester, N. Y., was blamed on lightning . . ."

As if on cue a streak of lightning cut through the afternoon sky, followed almost at once by a crash of thunder. "Any chance that lightning could have killed Mother Fortune?" I asked.

"Hardly. The storm just started, and in any event a bolt of lightning would certainly not go unnoticed by the neighbors."

I sipped my wine and glanced behind the bar, where the Notre Dame football team had just faded from the TV set, to be replaced by a dark-haired girl singing *That Old Black Magic*. The song seemed appropriate to the occasion.

"Then what killed her?" I asked. "Do you know?"

"I've known since before she died," Simon Ark replied unhappily. "It was one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to make, to let her die like that. But it was the only chance to save those college girls."

"You mean the spell will be lifted now that the witch is dead?"

"Not exactly; but it will force a very clever killer into the open."

"Then Mother Fortune was murdered, and by natural means!"

"She was murdered, but who is to say that any method of murder is natural? They are all weapons of the devil, in one way or another. Always remember that—every murder, every crime,

is supernatural, in the sense that it was inspired by Satan."

The bartender switched off the television set, and we were alone with the constantly irregular crashes of thunder from the outside world.

"Did Satan kill her, then?" I asked, and I knew that Simon Ark would not consider the question a foolish one. "The way all those other people were burned to death?"

"Only indirectly. Perhaps the real killer is a man who's been dead for nearly two thousand years. Because in a way, you see, Mother Fortune was killed by the ancient Roman emperor, Lucius — better known as Nero . . ."

SIMON ARK would say no more on the subject of the old fortune teller's mysterious death. He seemed to dismiss the subject from his mind and turned instead to questioning me about the activities of Hudsonville College.

"Do they have any summer courses at all?" he wanted to know.

"No, it's closed up completely all summer. Most of the exclusive girls' colleges are. Why do you want to know that?"

"Just filling in bits of the picture. Now I must make an important telephone call to Washington. Perhaps then we can return to the college."

He talked on the telephone

for some time, and when he came out of the booth he seemed pleased. We left the bar and drove through the gentle rain toward the campus of Hudsonville College.

It was almost dark by the time we arrived, and already the remains of the heat wave had given way to an autumn dampness that chilled our bones. We went first to Miss Bagly's quarters, where Simon Ark inquired as to the girls' condition.

"It's not good, Mr. Ark," she told him. "Nearly all the girls in the college are sick in one way or another now. For some it's probably all in the mind, but I'm really worried about a few of them. I do wish Dr. Lampton would allow us to call in outside help."

"That has all been taken care of, Miss Bagly," he told her. "There will be doctors here within a few hours. But first I must discover the cause of the evil that lurks within your walls."

"I heard that the witch . . . Mother Fortune . . . was dead. Will that help the girls?"

"In a way it will, Miss Bagly. But I fear we'll be unable to completely save the good name of your school." She started to say something else, but he held up his hand to silence her. "Are you certain, Miss Bagly, that none of your faculty has been affected by this sickness?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ark. Just the girls have been stricken. Ex-

cept, of course, for our swimming instructor, who's not really a . . ."

But she never had a chance to finish her sentence. Simon Ark was already out of the room and hurrying down the steps. I ran after him, and I heard him mumble, "Of course! The swimming pool. Of course . . ."

AND WE ran through the night, toward the shadowy building that resembled the old Roman baths. Inside, all was darkness, and even the glistening waters of the pool itself were black. We were alone, and Simon Ark drew me into the deeper shadows.

We waited, for what I did not know, and as we waited Simon Ark talked, in a voice so low it hardly reached my ears.

"Suppose," he began, "suppose you were an agent of a foreign power, or even of some private enterprise. Suppose you stole a quantity of radioactive mineral — colbalt or something similar — to use for your own illegal purposes. Suppose you found it necessary to hide it, safely, for a period of several weeks. Where . . . where could you safely hide a supply of illegal radioactive mineral for several weeks? Where would it be far enough away from people so as not to harm anyone with its dangerous rays?"

And I answered him. "In the middle of a college campus closed for the summer vacation.

With no one but an occasional watchman to be exposed briefly to its rays."

The darkness was very dark then, and the evil of the unknown hung heavy around us. "Exactly," Simon Ark continued. "And when the school reopened for the Fall before you could get rid of the deadly metal, then what would you do? What would you do to explain the radioactivity that would begin to strike down the girls?"

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean that this building is full of low, but dangerous, amounts of radioactivity. That's what's wrong with those girls, and any doctor who'd been active in recent years would probably have recognized the symptoms. Unfortunately, Doctor Lampton did not, and his pride kept him from calling in assistance. I knew it almost from the beginning, which is why I suggested the blood tests. But I didn't know until tonight just where the source of the dangerous rays was. It had to be some place that the girls used, but not the teachers. I never thought of the swimming pool until now."

"Then the witch business was all a blind!" I said. "The person who hid the uranium or cobalt found out about Mother Fortune's past life and used it as an excuse for the radioactive sickness."

"Correct. A clever but devilish plot. Of course he couldn't depend on the assistance of a crazed old woman forever, so he had to arrange for her death when he feared she might talk."

"But whom . . . ?"

The question was answered for me by a sudden movement on the far side of the black pool. We were no longer alone in the building.

Simon Ark stepped out of the shadows and shouted across the width of the pool. "All right, Professor Westwood. We know all about your murderous activities . . ."

PROFESSOR Hugh Westwood looked at them from across the pool, and he might have been a demon conjured up by Satan himself. Even in the darkness I could feel the evil that seemed now to radiate from him, just as another evil radiated from a rock hidden somewhere in this building.

"It's too late to escape, Professor Westwood. I've already talked to Washington, and they confirmed the theft of the radioactive minerals from a testing lab in New York two months ago. There are doctors and F.B.I. agents on their way here right now. Of course your friends have already been arrested, which is why they never came for the rocks. Where is it, Professor? In the pool itself? In the drain pipe, possibly?"

But Westwood let out a cry of rage, and a tongue of fire seemed to leap from his fingers into the pool. Instantly a wall of flame shot up between Westwood and ourselves. I had just a second to realize that the water in the swimming pool was somehow on fire, and then everything was a nightmare . . .

OF COURSE we found out later that, in anticipation of danger, Westwood had poured oil on the waters of the pool and then thrown a match into it; but in that instant with the flames all around me it seemed as though the very gates of hell had opened to receive us.

I'll never forget those final seconds, as Simon Ark and Professor Westwood stalked each other around the blazing pool, with the flames leaping high and beating at the skylight until at last the glass burst and showered down upon us.

This was hell, and here at last was Simon Ark, stalking a modern-day version of the devil himself, while the flames waited to consume them both. And then, finally, in a sudden clash of good and evil, their two bodies met and locked in deadly combat, and toppled together into the waiting flames . . .

The fire died as quickly as it had started, leaving only the steaming water beneath. The oil fire had burnt itself out just in time, for I doubt if even a

man such as Simon Ark could have survived another minute in the heated water under those flames. As it was, we were too late to save Professor Westwood. He was already dead when we pulled him from the water . . .

Later, much later, after the doctors and the police and the F.B.I., after the finding of the thin tube of radioactive cobalt in the swimming pool drain, after everybody had talked and listened and asked . . .

"But how did he kill the woman, Simon? How did he kill Mother Fortune?"

He looked at me with eyes that seemed tired, and he replied. "Remember yesterday in his office, when he tore a sheet from his pad. Remember a Latin phrase that was written on that sheet? It said '*tunica molesta*', and that told me the answer even before the crime was committed. '*Tunica molesta*' was a name given to one of Nero's particularly horrible devices for killing early Christians. It was a tunic or mantle embroidered with the finest gold. Early Christians and criminals were brought into public arenas dressed in these garments, which were made of a highly combustible cloth that burst into flame when touched with the slightest spark."

I remembered the robe that had been hanging in Mother Fortune's trailer. "You mean

Westwood made one of these things and gave it to her?"

"Exactly. He no doubt told her it was a reward for her part in the scheme, though I doubt if she ever realized the true nature of his plot to cover up the cache of radioactive cobalt. She was just a confused old woman who jumped at an opportunity of revenging herself upon the school that had once expelled her."

"But you said this garment needed a spark or something to ignite it. How did he get into the trailer to set the robe on fire?"

"He didn't. Once he'd given it to her, he didn't have to worry about the outcome. Remember those cigaret burns we noticed on the sleeves of her old robe? He knew that sooner or later she would smoke a cigaret while wearing the '*tunica molesta*'. And he knew that in her clumsy manner, she'd let a single deadly spark fall onto her robe . . ."

"And you knew this all the time?"

"I suspected it. As a murder method it isn't as strange as you might think, considering the fact that the killer was a professor of ancient history at a school that specialized in the early Roman Empire. The term '*tunica molesta*' came easily to his mind, and his only mistake was in jotting it down on his pad one day. I knew, though, that once Mother Fortune was dead he'd have to get rid of the cobalt, or the whole idea of the hex would be exploded as a fake, and Doctor Lampton would start looking for some medical reason for the girls' illness."

"It still seems so fantastic," I said.

"Life itself is fantastic, and death even more so. There are men in this world far more evil and far more clever than Professor Westwood, and as long as these men live the fantastic will be commonplace . . ."

He left me then, walking out through the night as suddenly as he'd come, but this time I was sure I'd not heard the last of Simon Ark . . .



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Doctor Satan

by Paul Ernst

BUSINESS WAS being done as usual in the big outer office of the Ryan Importing Company. Calls came over the switchboard for various department heads. Men and girls bent over desks, reading and checking order blanks, typewriting, performing the thousand and one duties of big business.

Yet over the office hung a hush, more sensed than consciously felt. The typewriters seemed to make less than their

normal chatter. Employees talked in low tones, when they had something to communicate to one another. The office boy showed a tendency to tiptoe when he carried a fresh batch of mail in from the anteroom.

The girl at the switchboard pulled a plug as a call from the secretary of the big boss, Arthur B. Ryan, was concluded.

The office boy looked inquiringly at her as he passed. "How's the old man?"

Ascot Keane seeks out a criminal who combines science and the occult.

The girl shook her head a little. "I guess he's worse. That last call was important, and he wouldn't take it himself. He had Gladys take it for him."

"What's the matter with him, anyhow?"

"A headache," said the girl.

"Is that all? I thought from the way everybody was acting like this was a morgue, that he was dying or something."

"I guess this is something special in the way of headaches," the switchboard girl retorted, smoothing down the blonde locks at the back of her head. "And it came up awful sudden. He walked past here at nine, two hours ago, and grinned at me like he felt great. Then at ten he phoned down to the building drugstore for some aspirin. Now he won't take a call from the head of one of the biggest companies in the city! I guess he feels terrible."

"A headache!" snorted the office boy. "Well, why don't he go see a doctor?"

"I put through a call for Doctor Swanson, on the top floor of the building, ten minutes ago. He was busy with an appointment, but said he'd be down soon."

"A headache! And he can't take it! Wonder what he'd do if he got something serious the matter with him."

He swaggered on, and the hush seemed to deepen over the office. A premonitory hush?

Were all in the big room dimly conscious of the sequence of events about to be started there? Later, many claimed they had felt psychic warnings; but whether that is fact or imagination will never be known.

A hush, with a drone of voices and machines accentuating it in the outer office. A silence, in which the doors of the executives, in their cubicles along the east wall of the office space, remained closed. A quiet that seemed to emanate from the blank, shut door marked Arthur B. Ryan, President.

And then the hush was cracked. The silence was torn, like strong linen screaming apart as a great strain rips it from end to end.

From behind the door marked *President* came a shriek of pain and horror that blanched the cheeks of the office workers; a yell that keened out over the hush and turned busy fingers to wood, and which stopped all words on the suddenly numbed lips that had been uttering them.

Ryan's secretary, pale, trembling, ran from her desk outside the office door and sped into Ryan's office.

"Oh, my God!" the shriek came more clearly to the general office through the opened door. "My head . . . oh, my God!"

And then the screams of the

man were swelled suddenly by the high shriek of the secretary. "Look — look . . ."

There was the thud of a body in Ryan's office, telling the plain message that she had fainted; an instant later the agonized shrieks of the man in there were stilled.

For a second all in the general office were gripped by silence, paralyzed, staring with wide eyes at the door to the private office. Then the sales manager stepped to the open door.

He glanced into Ryan's office, and those outside saw his face go the color of ashes. He tottered, caught at the door to keep from falling,

Then, with the air of a man dazed by a physical blow, he closed the door and stumbled toward the switchboard.

"Phone the police," he said hoarsely to the girl. "My God . . . the police . . . though I don't know what they can do. His Head . . ."

"What — what's the matter with his head?" the girl faltered as her fingers stiffly manipulated the switchboard plugs.

The sales manager stared at her without seeing her, his eyes looking as if they probed through her and into unplumbed chasms of horror behind her.

"A tree growing out of his head," he gasped. "A tree . . . pushing out of his skull, like a plant cracking a flower-pot it

outgrows, and sending roots and branches through the cracks."

He leaned against the switchboard.

"A tree, killing him. Hurry! Get the . . ."

He lunged for her, but was too late; the switchboard girl had slid from her chair, unconscious. Blindly, with fingers that rattled against the switchboard, the man put through the call himself.

THAT WAS at eleven in the morning of July 12th, 193-, a day that made criminal history in New York.

At eleven-ten, in a great Long Island home, the second chapter was being written.

The home belonged to Samuel Billingsley, retired merchant. It was a huge estate, high-walled. In the walls a new iron gate glistened, closing off the front driveway. It was a high gate, heavily barred — the kind of a gate that would be installed by a man afraid for his life. Beside that gate two men lounged. Each was big, heavily muscled, with a bulge at his armpit speaking of a gun in readiness.

At the front door of the house another man was stationed; and there was one at the rear, and still another patrolling the grounds. This last one carried a rifle.

The summer sun gleamed bright over the estate. The si-

lence of the suburbs enveloped it, yet danger lowered like a black veil over the place.

A long low roadster slid to a stop before the closed iron gate. A young man, dark-haired, with dark gray eyes, sounded the horn. Reluctantly the gate was opened. The man drove the roadster in and started toward the house, but was stopped by the two guards who stood before the car with an automatic apiece covering its driver.

The young man glared. "Well?" he snapped. "Who the devil are you? What are you doing here?"

"Same to you, buddy," rasped one of the men, coming closer. "What's your business here?"

The young man glanced at the new, high gate and back to the guards.

"I'm Samuel Billingsley's nephew," he said. "My name's Merton Billingsley, I've been away for a month — and I come back to be stopped at the point of a gun at my own uncle's house . . ."

"Take it easy," said the man gruffly. "We're the old — I mean we're Mr. Billingsley's bodyguard. Hired us two days ago. Orders were to investigate everybody driving in here. Have you got any proofs that you're his nephew?"

The young man showed letters. His annoyance was giving way to curiosity — and alarm.

"Bodyguard!" he exclaimed.

"Why a bodyguard? Is my uncle's life in danger?"

The man shrugged. "I wouldn't know, but I guess it is or he wouldn't have hired us. He didn't tell us anything except to keep everybody out of the grounds."

Merton Billingsley clutched at the man's arm. "Is he all right now? Have there been any attempts on his life so far?"

"None yet," said the man, holstering his automatic. "And I guess he's all right — except he's got a headache."

"A headache?"

"Yeah. His high-hat butler came down here a half-hour ago, and said a doc had been called and we were to let him through. The old — Mr. Billingsley had a bad headache. The doc came ten minutes ago and is up in his room with him now. But aside from the headache, he's all right . . ."

Through the golden summer sunlight, like jagged lightning impinging on the ear-drums instead of the optic nerves, a scream lanced out. It was a thin, high shriek that drove the color from the faces of Merton Billingsley and the two guards. It came from behind a shaded window in the front corner of the great house.

"My uncle's room," breathed Merton. "What . . ."

He swallowed, and jerked his head to the two guards. "On the

running-board," he snapped. "We'll get to the house . . ."

The whine of gears drowned his words. With a guard on each side, the roadster sped down the graveled driveway and to the house.

The door opened as Merton got to it. A gray-headed butler faced him.

"Wilys!" exclaimed Merton. "My uncle . . . what in God's name is the matter with him?"

The man shook his head. "I don't know. He complained of having a terrific headache, sir. And I phoned for Doctor Smythe. Then, just a minute ago he screamed . . ."

Down the curved marble staircase to the front hall a man was stumbling — a middle-aged man whose eyes were wide and whose features were distorted.

"Smythe!" said Merton. "Uncle Samuel . . . tell me! Quick!"

The doctor stared at him. He moistened his lips. "Your uncle is dead."

"Dead! But what happened to him? He was an old man, but he was in good health. What killed him?"

"A plant," whispered the doctor. "A kind of bush. Thorn-bush — God knows what! That thing, blossoming from his head . . ."

Merton shook his shoulder savagely. "Are you insane? Pull yourself together! What's this talk of bushes?"

"A bush . . . growing out of

his head!" whispered the doctor, moistening his pale lips again and again.

MERTON STARTED up the stairs. Smythe, rousing himself, grasped his arm. "Don't go up there, Merton! Don't!"

Merton wrenched his arm away. "My uncle lies up in his room, dead — and you tell me not to go up to him!"

He took the stairs two at a time.

"I'm warning you," came the doctor's shrill voice. "The sight you'll see . . ."

But Merton went on, around the curve in the staircase, down the hall at the top.

The door to his uncle's room was closed. Impetuously he opened it and leaped inside the big bedroom. It was dim in there, shaded against the sunlight; but after a few seconds he saw it — his uncle's body.

It lay beyond the big bed, the corpse of a man of seventy, thin, clad in a silk robe. The body was twisted and distorted, but it was not the body that riveted the gaze of the dead man's nephew; it was the head.

The head was turned so that, though the body lay on its side, the face was pointed toward the ceiling. And from the top of the skull something was protruding. Merton's hands crept toward his throat as he looked at it.

A sort of bush, with leafless,

sharp-pointed twigs branching out in all directions, grew from the top of the skull. It was like a hand with many small sharp fingers that had thrust up through the bone, with its thick, wrist-like stem rooting in the brain beneath.

A tree, quick with life though rooted in death! Quick with life? As Merton stared with glazing eyes, he saw the leafless, sharp little branches crawl out a little farther. *The thing was growing even as he watched it!*

With a low cry, he turned and ran from the room.

2.

IN A Park Avenue penthouse two men were seated in a great room fitted out as a library. The room was lined with books, in sections which were unobtrusively but precisely labeled as sections of shelving in public libraries are labeled. *Science*, one of the largest sections, crammed with books, was tagged. Another read, *Mythology*; a third, *Occult*. Then there were *Psychology*, *Engineering*, *Biology*, many others, each containing dozens of volumes.

The focal point of the big, lofty chamber was a huge ebony desk. It was at this desk that the two men were seated, one in a leather chair beside it, the other leaning back in a swivel chair from before it.

The man in the visitor's chair

was about fifty, expensively dressed, a typical big business man with the suggestion of a paunch that comes with success and a striving after more millions instead of physical fitness. But there was one thing about this business man that was not typical. That was the expression on his face.

Fear! The blind terror of an incoherent animal caught in a trap beyond its comprehension!

His face was gray with fear. His lips were pallid and his hands were shaking with it. The sound of his ragged breathing was clearly audible in the almost cathedral-like hush of the great library.

The man sitting proprietorially at the desk watched his visitor with almost clinical detachment, though sympathy showed in his deep-set eyes. A man to attract attention in any gathering on Earth, this one.

He was a big man, but supple and quick-moving. His eyes, deep under coal-black eyebrows, were light gray; they looked calm as ice, as if no emergency could disturb their steely depths. He had a high-bridged, patrician nose, a long chin that was the embodiment of strength, and a firm, large mouth.

His mouth moved, clipping out words with easy precision. "You say you got the note yesterday, Walstead?"

Thus casually he addressed Ballard W. Walstead, one of the richest men in the city.

"Yes," said the man in the visitor's chair.

"Why did you come to me with it?"

"Because," said Walstead, raising a trembling hand in a repressed gesture of pleading. "I thought if anyone on Earth could save me it would be you. Oh, I know about you, though I realize that not a dozen people in the world are aware of the real life of Ascott Keane. These few know you as one of the greatest criminal investigators that ever lived — a man whose achievements have something almost of black magic in them. They know that you've raised a hobby of criminology into an art that passes beyond the reach of genius."

Ascott Keane's calm, steely eyes stared steadily into the frantic depths of the other man's pale blue ones.

"I am a dilettante," he murmured. "I inherited a fortune, and I loaf through life playing with first editions, polo ponies and big game hunting."

"Yes, yes, I know. That's the picture the world has of you. The picture you've deliberately painted; but I tell you I know your capabilities! You've got to help me, Keane!"

Keane's long, strong hand went out. "Let me see the note."

Walstead fumbled in his pocket and drew out a folded sheet of paper. Handling it as though it were a deadly serpent, he handed it to Keane, who spread it out on the desk.

"*Ballard Walstead,*" Keane read aloud. "*You are hereby given a chance to purchase a continuation of your rather useless life. The price of this continuation is the round sum of one million dollars. You may pay this in any way you please — even in checks, if you like, for if ever you attempt to trace the checks you will die. And if you refuse payment you will die even more quickly.*"

"*You will disregard this as a note from a crank, of course. But by noon tomorrow you will know better. You see, I have given two other men, Arthur B. Ryan and Samuel Billingsley, a choice similar to yours — and I believe they are going to defy me. Read in the afternoon papers what happens to them, Walstead. And believe me when I say that the same thing will happen to you if you do not meet my price. Directions will be given to you tomorrow noon as to where and how you are to pay the money. Your obedient servant, Doctor Satan.*"

Keane looked up from the paper.

"Doctor Satan," he repeated. Into his steel-gray eyes came a

hard, relentless glint. "Doctor Satan!"

"You know him?" asked Walstead eagerly.

"I know of him. A little. You read in the papers this afternoon of what happened to Ryan and Billingsley?"

"Yes," whimpered Walstead. "My God, yes! And that's what will happen to me Keane, if you won't help me." He shuddered as though drenched with icy water. "A tree — growing out of a man's head! Killing him! How can such things be done?"

"That is something only Doctor Satan can answer. Did you get instructions about where to pay the money this noon, as is promised in this letter?"

In answer, Walstead drew out another bit of notepaper.

"Walstead:" Keane read. *"Leave the money either in thousand-dollar bills or in checks up to twenty thousand dollars apiece, in the trash can at the corner of Broadway and Seventy-Sixth Street, tonight at nine o'clock. If checks, make them payable to Elias P. Hudge. Signed, Dr. Satan."*

Keane's eyes searched Walstead's again. "Are you going to do it?"

"I can't!" exclaimed Walstead hysterically. "I'm a wealthy man, but my affairs are in such a state that to take a million dollars in cash from my busi-

ness would bankrupt me! I can't!"

KEANE'S LONG, powerful fingers formed a reflective pent-roof under his long, powerful chin.

"You're going to defy Doctor Satan, then."

"I must!" cried Walstead. "I have no choice."

Keane's fingers moved restlessly.

"This Doctor Satan must have known your affairs were such that you couldn't meet his order. And he must have foreseen that you would have to refuse his demand. . . . Were you in your office when the second note was delivered?"

"Yes."

"Who delivered it?"

Walstead shivered again. "That is one of the deepest mysteries of all. No one delivered it."

Keane stared.

"Nobody delivered that note!" Walstead repeated. "I was alone in my office, reading over some papers. I turned away from my desk a moment. When I turned back, the note was there, on top of the other things. No one had come in. The window was closed and locked. Yet the note — was there. It — it was like witchcraft, Keane!"

Keane's fingers, stilled for a moment, moved restlessly again. "You may be speaking more truly than you know, Walstead."

After you received the note, what did you do?"

"I stayed in my office till four-thirty. Then I went down to the building lobby, and saw the afternoon papers. Screaming headings about the deaths of Ryan and Billingsley. After that I came here as fast as my chauffer could drive me."

"Did anything unusual happen to you on the way?"

Walstead shook his head. "Nothing. I got into my car at the office building, was driven straight here; and got out in front of your building."

"No one said anything to you? Or, perhaps, jostled you?"

"No one," said Walstead. Then his lips tightened. "Wait a minute. Yes! A man bumped into me just as I was coming into this building entrance."

Keane's eyes narrowed till all that was apparent of them was two gray glints. "Can you describe him?"

"No. I didn't pay any attention to him at all, after I saw he had no weapon in his hand and meant me no harm. His shoulder brushed against my neck and cheek, and then he was gone, after apologizing."

Keane got up from his desk. His eyes were more inscrutable than ever. "I'll do all I can to help you," he said. "Suppose you run along now, Walstead."

Walstead jerked to his feet with frenzy and perplexity in

his face. He was almost as tall as Keane, but didn't give the appearance of being nearly so big.

"I don't understand, Keane. Are you throwing me over? Aren't you going to act with me against this Doctor Satan?"

"Yes, I'm going to act against Doctor Satan." Muscle ridged out in Keane's lean cheeks. "You go along home."

"I'd hoped you would let me stay here, with you, till the danger was past . . ."

"You will be in no more danger at home than you would be here," replied Keane, with odd gentleness in his tone. "My man will show you to the door."

With the words, Keane's man appeared; a silent, impassive-looking fellow who handed Walstead his hat and stick. Walstead, with many protests, went out . . .

"BEATRICE," Keane called softly, when he was alone in the big library again.

A section of the shelving, lined with books, swung smoothly away from the wall, forming a doorway. Through it came a girl with a shorthand notebook and a pencil in her tapering hands. She was tall and beautifully formed, with dark blue eyes and hair that was more red than brown.

"You sent him away!" she said, eyes at once accusing and

bitterly disappointed. "You wouldn't help him. You sent him away."

"He is past help," replied Keane. "The stranger that jostled him in front of the building — that stranger was death. Perhaps Doctor Satan himself, perhaps a helper."

"How can you know that?"

Keane breathed deeply. "Doctor Satan must have known in advance that Walstead could not pay his demands. Hence he must have planned to use him from the start as a sacrifice — a third horrible example of what happens to wealthy men who defy him. The man who jostled him planted death's seeds in him. He will die within the hour, with one of those unearthly shrubs forcing its way up through his skull."

"Still — you sent him away."

"I did, Beatrice. Suppose he died here. The police! Many questions! Detention! And I don't want to be delayed; I have work to do now that makes any of my former tasks seem like unimportant games. Doctor Satan! With three rich men dead, no others will defy him. He'll loot the city — if I can't stop him."

The girl, Beatrice Dale, Keane's companion as well as secretary, fingered the notebook in which was recorded the talk between him and Walstead.

"Who is Doctor Satan, As-

cot?" she said. "I don't seem to remember that he has figured in any of your former work."

"He hasn't; Doctor Satan is a new phenomenon. I've been expecting to hear from him ever since I heard the first whisper of his existence a month ago. Now, with these three fantastic murders, he makes his bow. Who is he? Where does he hide? What does he look like? I don't know — yet."

He began pacing up and down before his big ebony desk.

He chanced to be looking at the chair when it happened. The chair, also ebony, was pushed a few feet back from the desk. It was tilted back a bit, with the felt pad slightly awry from the movement of his body as he had left it.

It squatted there, a dark, inanimate thing at one instant. At the next there was a soft *pouff* of sound — and the chair leaped into blue incandescence. Lamberent flame played over it, so hot that it blasted the faces of Keane and Beatrice five feet away. For perhaps four seconds the blue flame persisted. Then it died out as suddenly as it had appeared.

And the chair was no longer there. In its place was a little heap of fine ash, smoldering on the carpet.

Keane gazed slowly into Beatrice's horrified eyes. "I don't

know about Doctor Satan yet," he repeated coolly, "but apparently he knows a great deal about me! — Well, what is it, Rice?"

Keane's man stood in the library doorway, staring first at his master and then at the tiny heap of ash that was all that was left of the ebony chair.

"Mr. Walstead just died, sir," he said. "It was in the lobby of the building, just as he was about to step into the street. He's lying down there now." Rice's eyes flashed bleakly. "There's something pushing up through his head, sir. Little sharp spikes of something, like branches of a little tree, or bush."

3.

THREE MILES away, in a windowless, black-draped room, figure bent over a metal table in the attitude of a high priest bending over an altar.

The figure looked like one robed for a costume ball, save that in every line of it was a deadliness that robbed it of all suggestions of anything humorous or social.

Tall and spare, it was covered by a blood-red robe. Red rubber gloves swathed the hands. The face was concealed behind a red mask that curtained it from forehead to chin with only two black eyes, like

live coals, showing through eyeholes.

Lucifer! And to complete the mediaeval portrait of the Archfiend, two horned red projections showed above the red skullcap that hid the man's hair.

Before him, on the metal table, a thin blue flame died slowly down into a sprinkling of yellowish powder from which it had originally been born. The blue flame was the only light in the room. By its flicker could be seen three other men, crouching around the walls and watching the flame with breathless intensity.

One of these three was a young man with an aristocratic but weak face. The other two were creatures like gargoyles. The first was legless, with his great, gorilla-like head, set on tremendous shoulders, coming up only to a normal man's waist. The second was a wizened small monkey of a man with bright, cruel eyes peering out from a mat of hair that covered all his features.

The blue flame on the metal table died out. The red-clad figure straightened up. A gloved hand touched a switch and the room was illuminated with red light.

"Ascot Keane," said the man in Satan's costume, "has escaped the blue flame."

The three men around the walls breathed deeply. Then

the younger, with the weak face, scowled. "How do you know that, Doctor Satan?"

"If the flame had consumed him," Doctor Satan said, "the blue fire would have burned red while his body was devoured. It did not burn red."

The younger man walked toward the table. He moved with a curious air of ringing defiance. "How do you control the flame, Doctor Satan?"

The coal black eyes burned into his through the eyeholes in the red mask.

"It is all in here," Doctor Satan said at last, pointing to an ancient roll of papyrus spread flat on a stand near the metal table. "The ingredients of the flame were compounded first in Egypt, five thousand years ago. To these ingredients are added powdered bits of the person of the one to be consumed by the flame. Fingernail parings, hair, bits of discarded clothing, for instance. Then when the powder is burned, the person burns, though a thousand miles of distance separate him from the blue fire."

"Yet Keane escaped," said the young man, watching Doctor Satan narrowly.

"I had no bits of Keane's person to place with the chemicals. He is too shrewd to have allowed hair or nail clippings to be smuggled from his home. I had only a sliver of the chair

in which he customarily sits. Obviously he wasn't in the chair when I touched off the fire, and so escaped death."

THE YOUNG MAN lit a cigarette. The frightened defiance of his every gesture was heightened by the manner in which he lit it. The death tree, Doctor Satan. How do you work that?"

"It is a species of Australian thornbush," Doctor Satan said without hesitation. "Rather, it was, till with a certain botanical skill I altered it into a thing that flowers in two hours or less, rooting in a man's brain. The only drawback is that the seed, a tiny thing that floats in air, must be inhaled by the victim, to lodge in the nasal passage and later work its way up to the brain."

"You have more seeds of this tree?"

"Yes," said Doctor Satan. His manner was strange, his voice almost gentle, but there was a deadliness in the very gentleness. The monkey-like little man with the hairy face, and the legless giant with the huge shoulders, stirred restlessly in their positions by the wall.

"Why didn't you use the flame on Ryan and Walstead and Billingsley?" questioned the young man. "That would have been easier than killing them with your thornbush."

"Easier," conceded the grim

figure in red, "but not quite so spectacular. I wanted those three to die as fantastically as possible, so the requests I make on other rich men will be more quickly granted."

Doctor Satan walked to the stand on which the papyrus rested. He pulled out a drawer and took from it ten bundles of currency. In each bundle were thousand-dollar bills. And the band around each bundle proclaimed that each contained a hundred such bills.

"The first contribution," Doctor Satan said. "From William H. Sterling, the philanthropic manufacturer of automobiles. One million dollars."

The young man stared at the heap of currency with glistening eyes. A fortune, in such small compass that it could be concealed under a man's clothes!

But now, at the same time, he seemed suddenly to sense the mockery of Doctor Satan's geniality, and of his apparent frankness in disclosing his affairs. Color drained from his face, and more drained from it at Doctor Satan's next words. "You know a great deal about me, don't you, Monroe?"

Monroe swallowed painfully, then straightened his shoulders. "Yes, I know a lot. I know your real name — a family name familiar to everyone in the United States. I know your philosophy of life; how you, an enor-

mously wealthy man, tired of all the thrills that money can buy, have turned to crime. I know you intend to make your crimes pay as part of your game. I know you have studied the occult and the scientific, in preparation for this debut. And now I know how you control two of your murder tools — the blue flame and the tree of death."

Doctor Satan's eyes bored into Monroe's till the younger man gripped the edge of the metal table for support.

"Yes, you know a lot, Monroe," he crooned. "More than anyone else living. You wouldn't think of betraying me, would you?"

"Not if you treat me fairly, Doctor Satan. But if you try to double-cross me, you are lost. In a safe deposit box which is to be opened by my lawyer in case an 'accident' happens to me there is a full account of yourself . . ."

His voice trailed off into a frightened squeak at the look in Doctor Satan's coal-black eyes. The red-clad figure appeared to loom taller and taller, till it almost filled the room. And now all the defiance was gone from Monroe's posture, leaving only the fright.

"What are you — going to do?" he panted. "What . . ."

Again his voice trailed off, but this time it ended in a thick-

ness like that of beginning sleep.

Doctor Satan's eyes, glittering, ruthless, held Monroe's eyes. Doctor Satan's hand passed slowly before Monroe's face. The monkey-like man and the legless giant watched from the wall.

"You are asleep." Doctor Satan's voice sounded somnolently in the silent, windowless room.

"I am asleep," breathed Monroe, wide, glassy eyes fixed on the red mask.

"You will tell me all you know and all you hope to do."

"I will tell you all I know and all I hope to do."

"What are your plans concerning me?"

FOR A SECOND, Monroe's still features twisted, as though even in hypnosis his will fought to avoid answering that question. Then his lips moved mechanically.

"I am going to inform the police how to find you when you collect your next looted million. Then I am going to take the money, and the seeds of the death tree and the chemicals for the blue flame, and collect more money myself."

"It is enough," said Doctor Satan, still in that almost gentle voice.

The monkey-like man and the legless giant looked at each other. Doctor Satan had pro-

nounced a death sentence.

Doctor Satan spoke to them, eyes never leaving Monroe's face. "Girse. Bostiff." The two moved toward Monroe. The monkey-like man known as Girse hopped like a deformed ape. Bostiff hitched his giant torso over the floor with his thick arms, using his calloused knuckles as feet.

"The iron box, Bostiff."

Bostiff hitched his way to one wall, pushed back the sable drapes and drew from a three-foot niche a coffin-like box that gleamed dully in the red light.

Doctor Satan's hand went out. He plucked three hairs from Monroe's blond head. He laid the hairs on a small pile of the yellowish powder on the metal table.

"You will lie down in the box, Monroe," he droned.

The blond young man walked with jerky steps to the metal coffin and lay down in it.

"The lid, Bostiff."

Picking up the massive iron cover of the coffin as easily as though it were a pot lid, the legless giant put it on the box. Then, without further orders, he dragged the metal coffin back to its niche in the wall and slid it home in the surrounding stonework.

Doctor Satan picked up a pinch of the yellowish powder and crumbled it sharply in his fingers. The tiny heap on the

table burst into blue flame. The three blond hairs writhed and were consumed. . . .

The end of the metal coffin, showing from the niche, was suddenly red-hot, then glowing with white incandescence. Slowly it faded to deep, hot red in color, and back to black.

Cirse and Bostiff watched stolidly. If ever an investigator opened that box nothing would be found but a pinch of ashes. A pinch of ashes that had been a man, planning to betray the master.

Doctor Satan's voice sounded, calmly. "Danger has been eliminated from within. Now no one on Earth knows my real identity. It remains only to eliminate danger from without."

Bostiff spoke, his dull eyes fixed on Doctor Satan's mask. "The danger from without, Master?"

"Yes. The danger that lies in Ascot Keane. There is the only danger I recognize. The police? Ludicrous! Private detectives? Bodyguards hired by wealthy victims? They are children! But in Ascot Keane lies a threat."

The red-gloved hand touched the light switch. Slowly the red bulbs faded out, bathing the room in a lowering darkness like that of a lurid rapid sunset.

"But the threat of Ascot Keane is to be removed at once.

Walstead saw him. Walstead showed him the note. Keane will act on that knowledge — and with that action he will be trapped."

4.

IN FRONT OF a triple mirror before which was a bench holding hundreds of tiny pots and jars, Ascott Keane worked deftly. His fingers flew from jar to features, pot to face. And as they flew his face subtly altered. Already it was no longer the face of Keane. It was a countenance which to Beatrice Dale was vaguely familiar — though she could not yet name it.

"That hideous death shrub!" she said. "I can't yet see how it is used by Doctor Satan."

"You've seen Indian fakirs make a tree grow in a pot, haven't you?" said Keane. "Usually it's a miniature orange tree. They make it grow before your eyes, and pick an orange from it. Well, Doctor Satan's wizardry is something like that; only he utilizes a form of thorn-bush that flowers in human substance instead of earth."

He reshaped his lips with a collodion-like red lacquer, and the girl cried aloud. Keane's face was that of Walstead. Line for line it was Walstead's slightly puffy countenance that was reflected in the mirror. A close friend of the dead millionaire

would have been deceived.

"What are you planning to do, Ascott?"

Keane began pinning thin pads to the lining of his coat to give his lean strong body the bulk of Walstead's puffy body.

"Doctor Satan said in his note to Walstead to put the money in a trash can at Broadway and Seventy-Sixth Street. Very well, I'm going to take Walstead's place. Made up as him, I'll drop a package in that can — and wait to see who picks it up."

Beatrice shook her beautiful, coppery brown head. "Walstead's death isn't out in the papers yet, but surely Doctor Satan must know that the man is dead. Or are you hoping to fool him?"

"Doctor Satan," said Keane dryly, "hardly has to wait to get his information from the newspapers."

"Then he'll know that the man who looks like Walstead, and who drops the package in the trash can, can't possibly be Walstead."

"That's right," said Keane, drawing on the padded coat and scrutinizing himself in the triple mirrors.

"But he'll know it's you! And he'll almost certainly try to kill you!"

"That's what I'm hoping," said Keane, putting on a hat of the type worn by Walstead.

"But Ascott . . ."

"It's like this," said Keane.

"Doctor Satan hasn't met me yet. I want him to underestimate me, so I am rather stupidly disguising myself as Walstead and going to the place where Walstead was to have gone, in the hope that Doctor Satan will trap me. In that event" — his jaw squared — "I think he'll be sorry."

mirrors. And it was not Keane

He stepped away from the who moved — it was *Walstead!*

In an antique Italian cabinet there was an extra wide drawer. Keane pulled this out. In it was a rolled papyrus that closely resembled the papyrus that had been spread wide in Doctor Satan's black room. Beside the papyrus was a little stone jar.

Keane opened the jar and took from it a bit of greenish paste, which he touched to his forehead, the soles of his shoes, and the palms of his hands.

"Marvelous beings, the ancient Egyptians," he said softly. "I recognized the blue fire that burned my chair — and would have consumed me if I'd been in it. The fire burned in many a temple along the Nile, but what the Egyptian wizards concocted they usually made fruitless by further research."

Beatrice caught his arm, her eyes fearful.

Keane pressed her hand. "Don't worry about me, my dear. I'll be back soon, and I

think I'll be back with news that this Doctor Satan, new peril to a city at yet ignorant of his existence, has passed on to the hell he should have reached long ago."

He walked to the door, moving as Walstead had moved. His eyes met the girl's deep blue ones. Then he was gone.

NINE O'CLOCK! Upper Broadway was crowded with night shoppers and movie-goers. Among the crowds near Seventy-Sixth Street moved a tall, slightly paunchy man who kept his face shadowed by the brim of his hat, a face that many in the city would have sworn was that of a ghost — of the dead Walstead.

On the northeast corner of Broadway and Seventy-Sixth a trash can showed. The man disguised as Walstead crossed to the can. Under his arm was a small parcel done up in newspaper. He dropped the parcel in the can, and walked on. Without a backward glance he rounded the next corner.

But once around the corner, Keane stopped and went back, moving like a shadow. He peered through the double angle of a corner plate-glass window at the trash can.

The can was of wire, with interstices in its walls through which the contents could be seen. When Keane had tossed the package into it, the can had

been half full of refuse. Now the old papers and odds and ends of trash seemed to be melting away, like water draining down through a hole. Lower and lower the contents sank — till finally the can was empty.

Keane shook his head a little, eyes gleaming like ice. "Transmission of substance through empty air!" he breathed.

None in the crowds so close to the can had noted the way the refuse slowly disappeared from within it, but Keane had caught it all. Moreover, he had seen that the trash had disappeared first from the north side of the can, as though it were flowing in that direction, melting into thin air as it flowed.

The north side of the can. Toward him.

Keane slunk into a doorway. His quick eyes roved over the Broadway crowd, and in a moment they rested on a figure that tensed his body. A tall, shambling man, across the street from the trash container, was walking slowly toward the Seventy-Second Street subway entrance. Under his arm was held a parcel done up in newspaper.

Keane's lips thinned. Doctor Satan was making sure he saw the parcel and followed the carrier!

He stepped unobtrusively from the doorway and into the Broadway crowds, where he followed the tall, shambling fig-

ure to the subway entrance. Was the tall figure that of Doctor Satan himself, or one of his helpers? Keane did not know; but he did know that he would have shot the man down in cold blood, had he not been fully aware that no weapon as crude as an automatic could prevail over an opponent like Doctor Satan.

THE TALL FIGURE got off the subway at a Greenwich Village station. Keane followed, a block behind.

His body was taut as a stretched tendon. He knew he was to be trapped, to be brought to a carefully devised death. He knew that, for the moment, Doctor Satan had dropped all other plans to concentrate on removing him.

He was prepared for violence as he walked along the dark Village street after the tall figure. He was ready for anything from a bullet or knife in the dark to an attack and abduction by masked men springing on him from dark area-ways; but he was not prepared for the thing that actually did happen.

At one moment he was following the tall figure. At the next the figure ahead had disappeared — and Keane was still moving forward, though he had willed his body to halt while he gazed around to see where the figure could have gone.

Keane strove to stop, to walk to right or left. He could not; his muscles were driven by another's will. And now another thing happened — a thing even more frightening. He began to lose his sight.

The dark street, the partly lighted buildings lining it, the sidewalk before him, all slowly, faded from his sight. But his body kept moving slowly, surely forward.

In a moment he was blind. He could see not one thing. But his feet seemed able to see. They bore him on without a stumble, raising for curbs, lowering him for gutters. Thus with no man forcing him, apparently, blindfolded as surely as if thick cloths were tied over his eyes, Keane moved to the will of Doctor Satan, toward the trap.

He felt himself turn. Under his hand was an iron railing. He felt himself going down steps. A door creaked open in front of him. He walked on, totally blind, and heard the soft creak, and a slam, behind him.

More stairs downward. Hands outstretched to scrape along the moist walls of a passage like a low tunnel. Steps again. A clang over his head as though a stone trap-door had been battened down above him. Finally a swish of drapes, and a gentle, yet deadly-sounding voice that made every nerve-end in his body twitch.

No need to speculate on the

ownership of that voice! The arrogance that lay behind the softness of it told him. It was the voice of Doctor Satan himself.

5.

SLOWLY KEANE'S eyesight returned to him, to telegraph to his mind weird, nightmare pictures.

Black-draped walls closed him in. Lounging against one wall were two men — a man with a giant's torso and no legs, and a creature with a hairy, ape-like face in which were set bright, cruel little eyes.

Across from them was a metal brazier, set on a high tripod, in which a small flame flickered. In the center of the room was a metal table, bare save for a small pinch of yellowish powder. And over this table was bending the man who had spoken — a figure that set the blood to leaping in Keane's veins, as his heart thudded with sudden acceleration in his breast. A tall figure robed in red, with a red mask over the face, red gloves on the hands, and a red skull-cap from which protruded small mocking imitations of Satan's horns.

Doctor Satan turned from the metal table. His black eyes burned at Keane through the eyeholes of the red mask.

"Welcome, Ascott Keane," came sardonic words. "We are

honored that you should have gone to such trouble to visit us in our modest lair."

Keane's face, looking, in the red glare that illuminated the room, like something cast in bronze, remained impassive. Wordlessly he watched the diabolical figure in red.

The cultured tone was edged with steel as Doctor Satan continued.

"You committed suicide when you resolved a month ago to devote your life to destroying me. Oh, yes, I knew of the resolve the instant it was made. I have ways of knowing what is in men's minds; though I concede that you were able, shortly after that, to shield your brain from me. Tell me, Ascott Keane, what warned you of my existence?"

Keane stood straight and tall before the red-robed figure. His resemblance to Walstead faded, in spite of make-up, with the altering of his expression. He was Keane again, regardless of collodion-painted lips and padded clothes.

"A month ago," he said, "I talked with the son of a bankrupt friend of mine. The boy, a wild and not very strong character, said nothing significant. But I too can read a little of what is in men's minds; and in his I caught a glimpse of a figure in Satan's masquerade. I got a hint of the man's background and motives: a rich man,

still young, jaded with purchased thrills, with no more humanity in his heart than a snake — out to become the world's leading criminal. A man whose whimsical choice of a name, Doctor Satan, could not have been more apt in expressing his purpose. A sleek beast, playing a monstrous game. A thing to be stamped out as soon as possible."

The black eyes gleamed through the satanic mask. "Young Monroe, you are talking about. Fortunately he did not know my identity at that time. And now no one will ever know. Monroe is no longer in a position to talk. And some papers he left behind with his lawyer have been destroyed within the hour."

Now the arrogant voice was gentle again.

"So you decided to be the one to annihilate me. Noble Keane! But the roles will be reversed. It is you who will be annihilated. I marked you at the start as a nuisance to be eliminated. Wealthy yourself, with a fairly analytical mind, you have entertained yourself for years by scotching crime. But your career ends, with me, Keane. It ends now, in this room."

Girse and Bostiff slowly left the wall they had been lounging against. Girse came with quick, small steps to Keane's left side. Bostiff hitched his

great body, with swinging movements of his huge arms, to Keane's right side.

Keane still stayed motionless. Futile to attempt to overpower Doctor Satan physically: it could not have been done even had the gigantic Bostiff and the agile Girse not been there in the black-walled room. The walls of the trap he had entered were strong walls; and its teeth were sharp teeth, from which there seemed no escape.

Doctor Satan repeated an order he had given once before on that day. "Bostiff," he said softly, "the iron box."

The legless giant hitched his way to the wall, drew back a sable drape, and pulled from the niche in the stonework the coffin-like metal box.

Doctor Satan stared at Keane with green-glinting eyes. The stare held, minute after minute. Keane's eyes slowly glazed.

"You are asleep," droned Doctor Satan at length.

"I am asleep," breathed Keane.

Girse and Bostiff stared at each other with savage expectation on their faces.

"You shall do whatever I command," Doctor Satan said.

"I will do whatever you command," said Keane, like an automaton.

DOCTOR SATAN'S red-gloved hand went out toward Keane's head. He plucked three

hairs and laid them over the small mound of yellowish powder on the table. Act for act, he was duplicating the scene in which a treacherous disciple had been reduced from a man to a pinch of ashes.

"Take the lid from the box, Bostiff."

The legless giant lifted the iron cover from the coffin. Within it could be seen scattered fine ash.

"Keane, lie down in the box."

The black eyes gleamed with a feral light as Ascott Keane slowly walked to the box and lowered his body into it. Keane lay there, gazing up with wide, glazed eyes.

Bostiff placed the lid back on the box.

His dull eyes went from the box to the niche in the wall.

"No," Doctor Satan answered his unspoken question, "we'll not put the box in its crypt. Leave it where it is. I want to watch this."

The red-gloved hands clenched with eloquent triumph; the red-robed figure towered in the room. Then Doctor Satan turned to the metal table.

He picked up a bit of the yellowish powder and crumbled it between powerful fingers. The tiny heap on the table burst into clear blue flame. The eyes of Doctor Satan and his two servants turned toward the metal box in which lay Keane.

Swiftly the box glowed dull red, cherry red, white-hot. Its rays beat against the faces of the three, set the sable drapes to billowing a little. And in that white-hot metal coffin a thing of flesh and blood was lying — or had been lying when

The metal box lost its fierce the blue flame began to burn. — white glow. The heat rays beating from it faded in intensity. Doctor Satan's red robe stirred with the deep breath he drew.

"And so ends Ascott Keane," he said vibrantly. "The one obstacle in my path. I can be a king, an emperor, now, in time."

He turned to Girse and Bostiff.

"Go. I have no more need of you."

Bostiff hitched his huge body silently toward an end wall. He drew aside a drape and opened a door. Girse followed him out of it.

ALONE, Doctor Satan went to the cabinet and drew from a drawer the ten bundles of currency containing one hundred thousand-dollar bills apiece. The bundles disappeared beneath the red robe. His hand went toward the switch that controlled the red illumination of the room.

But his finger did not touch the switch. His hand remained suspended in the air, while he watched the iron coffin. And his red-robed body was as immobile as that of a statue.

The lid of the coffin was moving.

Slowly, steadily, it raised, to slide from the box and clang against the floor.

A hand and arm appeared above the edge of the box, which was still black-hot. The hand was unharmed. The coat sleeve above it was charred a little at the cuff: that was all.

Another hand and arm appeared, and then the body of Ascott Keane from the waist up as he sat in the coffin.

Silently, rigidly, Doctor Satan glared at him, and Keane got out of the coffin and stood beside it. Wisps of smoke rose here and there from singed garments, but his flesh was not even reddened by the fierce fire, and his gray eyes bored steadily at the black eyes behind the mask.

"What the Egyptians discovered," he said softly, "they rendered fruitless by succeeding discoveries. I read the origin of your blue flame in your first attempt on my life, Doctor Satan, and I took the precaution of using as armor some of the green paste the old priests used against the consuming fires of their enemies."

He took two slow steps toward the red-clad figure.

"You should have watched your flame, instead of the iron coffin, Doctor Satan. You would have seen then that the flame burned blue throughout; it

should have burned red if my body was devoured."

The breathing of the red-masked man sounded in the tense hush of the room.

"Now we are alone, Doctor Satan. You have considerably sent your men away, as I hoped you would do. We'll see if your powers are as strong as you think they are."

The glare faded from Doctor Satan's eyes, leaving them glacially cold.

"I'll not underestimate you a second time, Ascott Keane! The death shrub — the blue flame — you are armed against those. But I have other weapons."

"You'll never use them," Keane growled deep in his throat.

And then his hand shot up.

Around Doctor Satan's red-robed body a softly glowing aura suddenly formed. It was like a ball of pale yellow light which enclosed him, a lambent shell against the red rays of the room's illumination.

A snarl came from Doctor Satan's lips, sounding muffled, as though the lambent shell had actual substance and could stifle sound. He straightened, with the aura moving as his body moved.

His hands moved, weaving strange designs in the yellowed air. And slowly the aura faded a little from around him.

Tendons ridged up on the back of Keane's outstretched hand. Perspiration studded his

forehead with the intensity of his effort to overwhelm the figure in red.

That aura which he had flung around the red robed body was one of the most powerful weapons known to occultism: a concentration of the pure form of electricity known as the Life Force. Mantling a living thing as it mantled Doctor Satan, it should drain out life, leaving behind nothing but inanimate clay. Yet it was not harming this man!

SLOWLY, RELENTLESSLY, the aura continued to fade. And then Doctor Satan's hands rose and leveled toward Keane.

Strange duel between two titans — two men who probably knew more of Nature's dark secrets than any others on Earth. Odd battle, with Keane, the force of good, gradually being beaten down by the force of evil.

For now Keane's rigid arm was sinking as the yellow aura almost disappeared from around Doctor Satan. Slowly he sank to his knees, as if a great weight oppressed him. And, as though this great weight was that of some intangible sea which could suffocate as well as weigh down, he began to gasp for breath. Louder and louder his agonized breathing sounded in the room. Doctor Satan's black eyes glowed with triumph.

Keane could see nothing —

could feel nothing. Yet it was as if some colorless, invisible, tremendously heavy jelly were gradually hardening around him.

The red lights grew dimmer, though Doctor Satan had not touched the switch; Keane felt that he was almost lost.

With enormous effort he brought his arms up, spreading them wide at his sides. "Mother of God!" he whispered.

Like a living cross he was, in that position; with trunk and head the upright, and arms the horizontal bars.

"Mother of God!"

Doctor Satan's snarl was that of a beast. His eyes took on their feral green light, with a fiendish disappointment embittering their depths.

And the great, invisible sea that was beating Keane down gradually receded from around him. But as it receded, so dimmed the red lights, till the two men were in blackness.

"This time you preserve your life," Doctor Satan said, his voice gentle again, in the darkness. "Next time — you leave your life behind!"

There was a thud of sound, like a soft explosion.

"Next time," began Keane, struggling to his feet and forcing his body forward through the last traces of the deadly, unseen sea.

He stopped. He was alone in the black-walled room. Slowly the lights came up again, as

though shining ever more clearly through a psychic, thinning fog. Keane began wrenching the black drapes from the walls.

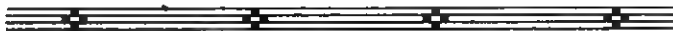
He found a door and opened it. Ahead of him he saw a low passage with steps at the end. He ran down the passage, up the steps. In a moment he was in the street, clutching the iron railing he had felt when he came here blinded.

Cursing softly, he looked up and down the sidewalk. There was, of course, no sign of the

red-clad figure. Doctor Satan had made good his escape. And with him had gone one million dollars, fruit of his first fantastic crime.

Keane's wide shoulders sagged, but only for a moment. Then they straightened.

The first round was Doctor Satan's. But there would be another time. And then, knowing a little more of the manner of being he was pitted against, he could fight more effectively — and win.



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The Secret Of The City

by Jerry Carr & Ted White

FOR Arthur Wainwright III it was the beginning of another of Manhattan's perennial gray days.

"There isn't any real winter in the city," his father had said once. "It just loses color and turns gray."

With the advent of October, the sun had left the sky to leaden clouds, and the bleak towers of the city seemed as dull and intangible as the gray

sky which camouflaged them. The sounds of traffic and rustling packages carried feebly in the thin air, like unheeded memories.

Arthur Wainwright III's soul was gray too, this morning, as he cut across town on 47th St., from Madison Ave. to Lexington Ave., his brown topcoat and dull homburg settled closely around his ears. He had just been fired — after eight years

A gleaming metal strip that ran through the
city — where did it lead?

of work which had been, he told himself, steady, sturdy, and trustworthy, though perhaps not terribly imaginative.

When he reached Lexington he paused, undecided. He felt vaguely out of place here on the morning street-corner. Ten O'Clock New York was a city he had seldom seen: at this time of day, he was never outside the office. Delivery trucks honked in their parking places; the men at newsstands rearranged their displays, and even the pedestrians walked more briskly at this hour. This was not his world.

He decided with great firmness that he should not take a cab home. It would be a luxury now. But where was the subway? It was supposed to run under Lexington.

As if to underscore his thoughts, a deep rumbling passed beneath his feet signaling the passage of a train. He stared downward, at the sidewalk on which he was standing, and discovered the strip.

Almost directly beneath his feet, a metal strip perhaps three-quarters of a foot wide ran across the sidewalk, dipped down into the dark gutter, cut across the street and ascended again to the sidewalk opposite. There it vanished into the side of the building, actually disappearing under it. Arthur stared at it for a few moments, mildly perplexed, and then turned

to trace its course in the opposite direction. There was little to see, however: the strip slid enigmatically under the building next to him and was gone.

His gaze returned to the portion of the strip under his feet. It was polished a burnished bronze where feet had walked on it; but against the building and in the gutter it was a dirty greenish-gray, compounded by a patina of spittle, cigarette butts, chewing gum, and the everpresent gray dust which constantly settled out of New York's air upon every exposed surface.

Arthur wrinkled his nose, and lifted his eyebrows in a facial shrug of dismissal. He turned and made his way along Lexington Ave., downtown.

WHEN HE reached 46th St., he glanced to his right before crossing. The metal strip was there again.

It seemed to ooze from under the edge of the building, near the corner close to Arthur, and then to sneak across the sidewalk for a moment beneath the accumulated litter to gather strength for its plunge across the morning-trafficked street, and then once more it was at the other side, up across the sidewalk, and safely into hiding again beneath another building.

Arthur contemplated the strip

for some time, while fellow-pedestrians sidestepped him or jostled by roughly. It was a strange strip, really, to find here in the middle of a city. It reminded him a little of expansion strips he'd seen on bridges. And yet, here it was, worming its way down the city, cutting across side-streets and burrowing under buildings. A curious phenomenon, and he wondered why he'd never noticed it before. Perhaps it was the dislocation that he felt this morning, with the gray air settling around his ears, that made him see it now for the first time.

When Arthur found the strip again at 45th St., he greeted it as an old friend. It was reassuring to find a constant running through this unfamiliar, piece-meal city, a spot of gleaming color among the cold towers. He smiled with amusement at himself as he crossed the street beside it.

"Cross me, mister?" His mind supplied the thin childlike voice, and he chuckled. Like a dutiful adult, he had helped this innocent strip cross a charging street. It was a morning for impracticalities.

Grand Central Station intervened, and 44th St. ended on the other side of the avenue, leaving Arthur feeling fretful that he might have lost the strip. But at 43rd St., there it was again, cutting quickly across the street to lose itself

once more in the crowds of buildings.

Arthur rounded the corner at 42nd St. expectantly, wondering just how the metal strip would handle so wide and important a cross-town street, but there was no answer to his question.

The strip was not there.

He looked quickly up and down the street, but there was nothing. What could have happened to it? Arthur felt suddenly shaken; the clouds seemed to pull down around him and the air itself turned dark, like a murky underwater in which he stood alone. He scurried into the store on the corner.

It was a drugstore, depressingly tawdry with its racks of pawed and limp paper-covered books, sleezy one-wear nylons, wilting cardboard displays for overpriced cosmetics, and a prescription counter which chalked most of its sales to covertly stocked contraceptives.

A young woman, her dirty blonde hair falling in stray wisps from a cluster of bobby-pins leaned over the cosmetic counter and eyed him dolefully.

"Kin I help ya?" she inquired in nasal tones.

"Oh . . . yes," Arthur said, starting from his distraction. "Could you tell me what's underneath this store?"

"Hah?"

"I mean, do you know whether there's a basement, or . . .?"

"I dunno. I just work here. Whyd'n ya ask the managa, Mister Frisby?" She pointed a fiery red fingernail across the store toward a stocky man in his mid-fifties and a once-clean white pharmacist's smock.

Arthur obediently trotted over to the older man, and fingering his homburg nervously said, "Pardon me, sir."

The pharmacist looked up at Arthur. "Yeah?"

"I — well, I just wanted to inquire about something. That is, do you have a basement?"

"Whadaya wanta know?"

"Well, I . . ." Arthur paused. What *did* he want to know?

"There ain't nothin' down there but trains," the other man said. "Any damn fool kin see that. There's all the trains from the Grand Central Station, and there's the Lex subway. Whadaya think we got — a wine cellar?" He guffawed at his witticism, and then stared directly into Arthur's eyes.

Arthur blushed, and hurriedly turned away.

"Thank you," he called as he made a quick exit.

Obviously the metal strip went underground at this point, and it would be no use searching for it with all those trains running around down there.

HE PAUSED for a moment, once safely out of the drugstore, and then turned resolutely back uptown, retracing his steps.

Everything was so strange this morning. He even seemed different himself: so determined, so tenacious in his pursuit of the metal strip. But in this gray city, that metal strip was a road to something; everything else seemed . . . unreal, out of phase from the steely gray reality, and essentially beside the point. Manhattan was a world built on an island, and he could no longer find the island. It was covered, camouflaged, by cement, from one end to the other. A hard, impenetrable disguise, arching over great man-made caverns, a shell from which the life that created it had crawled, long ago. The improbable thought flashed through his mind of an elaborate and empty sea-shell tossed up upon a New England beach where he had once spent a childhood summer.

Men crawled through the construct of Manhattan as ants through the many chambers of a shell, and yet remained unaware of the falsity of this monolithic gray facade. There was only one clue, one key: the metal strip which cleft the shell and penetrated it.

When he reached 43rd St. again, it was there. He'd been half-afraid it wouldn't be, but it was. He hurried on, reasserting contact with the glistening metal strip at each street as he came to it. 45th, 46th, 47th, and then . . . an area unknown.

He had no idea how far the strange strip would continue like this, and Arthur had dreadful visions of walking, on foot, through Harlem, if he could walk even that far, in his quest. Would he have to go so far? The strip showed no signs of tiring; its energy was as boundless as a young boy's; it drew upon a deeper source of sustenance than men knew. The implacable gray of buildings and pedestrians, faces turned away, flowed past him like chalky water.

At 50th St., he stopped dead. It was gone.

He came upon which Arthur stood,

Once again it had betrayed him. It had ducked underground, scorned the brittle perhaps to shoot off in a wide tangent, lost to him forever unless he could again find it by scouring every block in the city. It was gone, and with it the secret of the city.

HE SHOOK HIS head. He could not search the entire island. That was impossible.

"You all right, buddy?" a voice said gruffly at his ear. Arthur jumped, and when he turned, he saw a graying policeman who stared disinterestedly at him. For a moment Arthur wondered if the man might be blind — his eyes were so colorless, like a robot's — so lifeless. But that was ridiculous, even in Ten-Thirty New York.

"Why, yes, Officer . . . I'm fine," Arthur stammered. Then an idea occurred to him. This policeman walked the beat, and that meant that he knew the entire area for blocks around.

"Officer," he asked as the man began to turn away, "could you tell me — what happened to the little metal strip?"

"Metal strip?"

"Yes, you know. It runs right along here, all the way up from 43rd St. I mean, it crossed 49th St., but it's disappeared."

"Huh? Oh, you mean the expansion strip. The whole area's full of them. But they just run from about 43rd to 49th Streets. That's because they're running all these trains under here for Grand Central. All the tracks and yards are underground, and they just built the streets and buildings right over the tracks. It's like one big bridge, you know? Gotta have those expansion strips because of the heat and the cold. But they only run between 43rd and 49th and between Lex and Madison Avenues, where there's all the tracks. They don't go nowhere else."

"Oh, I see," Arthur said, slowly.

It wasn't right; he knew that. It wasn't right that his gleaming, burnished metal strip should be just an expansion strip, like hordes of others. That would mean it was just

another part of the island's facade.

He slowly turned his back on the policeman and began trudging back the way he'd come.

Suddenly he had a stroke of inspiration.

Somewhere between 49th and 50th Streets the tracks stopped and buildings began to perch upon solid ground again. If he found that point, couldn't he find the strip again, in one of the basements?

These buildings were expensive dwellings, hotels, and offices. Marble and echoing halls, directories with lists of names to throw him off the track. Look, they would say, this list tells you everything that's here, all the names, with capitals in red. His task wouldn't be easy.

ARTHUR glanced at the base of the building he was passing. Like those of the other buildings in this area, its walls did not come flush with the sidewalk, but ended inches shy of it. The sidewalk continued under the building, and then curved up to meet the overhang of the walls. He studied it closely for a moment, then approached a bored-looking doorman.

"I beg your pardon," Arthur said. "Could you tell me, please, why the bottom of this building looks like that?" He pointed.

The doorman glanced quickly down at the juncture between the building and the sidewalk,

and then returned his attention to Arthur.

"I dunno, Mac. What's wrong with it?" He eyed Arthur again, and then moved closer to the closed glass doors.

"Well, it's *differant*. I mean, why the bottom of this building doesn't come down just square with the sidewalk," Arthur said timidly.

The doorman pulled open one of the doors into the lobby of the building, and shouted, "Hey, Shep! Come here a minute!"

Arthur began to edge away, but before he had an opportunity to disappear, a stocky man with grizzled hair and work-clothes had joined the doorman. The doorman pointed at the strange joint between the building and sidewalk, said something, and pointed at Arthur. Arthur quailed; had he noticed something that was supposed to be a secret?

The other man pulled on his ragged moustache, and then spoke. "That's just the shock cushioning. This whole building is built over the railroad tracks, and there's a lot of rumble and shock down there which they don't want in the buildings. So the buildings rest on fancy shock absorbers, see."

The stocky man watched him for a moment, then frowned and started to go back inside.

Arthur said quickly, "Is that

how you can tell if a building is built over the tracks?"

"Yeah," the man said without pausing, and then the door shut behind him. Arthur turned and made his way up Lexington once more.

Somewhere in this block the trains stopped running underneath. It would be impossible to follow the metal strip among all those tracks and rushing trains, but once it came out into a relatively calm basement, Arthur might find it.

He scanned the building bottoms as he walked back towards 50th St. Somewhere . . .

Here! This building sat solidly upon the sidewalk, without pretense. Arthur quickly passed through the revolving doors into a richly brown lobby, lit from incandescent chandeliers held high in tawdry one-time splendor.

To his right was a bank of two elevators, their doors both closed by mock-golden portals. The old indicator hands pointed to higher floors. No one stood in the lobby.

Arthur drew in his courage, and pulled himself upright. Then, his breath slowly departing again, he peeked about for a way to descend into the basement. To his left was a door marked *Stairs, Emergencies Only*. He opened it and went through.

He was standing on a landing. Inconspicuous behind the

upbound stairs he found a dirtier set of steps leading down. He took them.

THE BASEMENT was not at all as he had imagined it. Instead of being one immense floor, it was a maze of passageways and rooms. As he began tiptoeing through them, he became more and more perplexed, for here there were countless cubbyholes, storage rooms, workrooms, and even one inexplicable room with an old cot and a dresser and mirror in it. He did not dare speculate over that room's use.

A large part of the basement was taken up by machinery. There were the elevator shafts and equipment, and then the elaborate boiler room, filled with great pipes and throbbing motors, and emitting a great blast of humid heat when he opened the door to it. People weren't supposed to look in here; there was a deep, angry rumbling which was hidden from those above. Arthur shut the door and retreated.

He had covered perhaps a third of the basement in this piecemeal fashion when he heard footsteps approaching him along the corridor.

Arthur was thunderstruck. He had no business here, he knew; none at all. If someone found him here, searching through the dim rooms where they ran everything . . .

He yanked open the first at hand, and stepped in.

As he quickly closed the door the darkness fell over him and he realized he hadn't seen a light switch.

He fumbled in his pockets for a pack of matches. Outside the door, he could hear two voices mumbling. He would have to wait here until the men moved on . . . and the dark distressed him.

Quickly, he tore a match loose and struck it. Nothing happened. Almost panicked, he struck it again. It lit, and when he held it aloft, it cast light for a radius of about six inches from his hand.

He looked wildly for a light switch, and then for a bulb hanging from the ceiling with a chain-pull, but in his haste he moved his hand too fast, making the match flicker and nearly die, and then it was burning his fingers and he dropped it. "Oh, God!" he whispered.

When he lit the next match, he held it high over his head and, eyes searching the ceiling, stepped forward into the room.

He had just sighted the light and reached eagerly for the cord hanging from it, when his toe caught on something, and he tripped, falling forward.

As he pitched off his feet, Arthur's hand reached desperately for the light-cord, and

grasped it, only to have it break in his hand as he fell.

The light switched blindingly on, and with it he heard a terrible ripping, buzzing, tearing noise.

Dirt and dust choked his nose and mouth, rising in clouds from where he'd fallen, and he coughed. His eyes stung, and he rubbed at them.

He could hear nothing but the sound which filled the room. He turned, squinting, to see what it was.

Coming into the room from every direction were metal strips.

They crawled from beneath every wall . . . tens, dozens of them. And they joined at the very spot where he had tripped.

Now, with the sound of a hundred grinding saws, highly amplified, like the roar of the world, each of them was slipping apart, splitting in two down the center, exposing great interlocking teeth which released their grip on each other in rapid succession while Arthur stared.

"*Giant zippers,*" Arthur thought to himself with a strange numbness. He stared for an awful moment into the black abyss opening before him, and felt his body shaking. For a moment he thought he was laughing.

On that gray day in October the island of Manhattan fell apart.

BOOKS (continued from page 24)

author's and Editors Wright and Derleth's enthusiasm for *Restless Souls* — a unique treatment of its theme. *The Silver Countess* and *The Poltergeist* are two more on the very top level. (But lesser level de Grandin can often be better than another's top level!)

You can't go wrong with this collection. RAWL'

STRANGE SIGNPOSTS

An Anthology of the Fantastic,
 Edited by Roger Elwood and Sam Moskowitz.

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 383 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10017; 319 pp., including Introduction by Roger Elwood; \$5.50.

Of the making of science fiction anthologies there is no end — yet, that does not mean that a particular new one cannot be worth adding to your shelf (or starting off with) if the anthologist has worked both with love and understanding and come up with a fresh viewpoint and a reasonably fresh selection. Sam Moskowitz fulfills both requirements well enough to make the present volume one that I shall want to keep and read; at present I can only list the contents for you.

The Last Man, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: this is a drastic condensation of a very long novel. I'm grateful — if the solid meat appeals, then I shall want the entire work. *Mellonta Tauta*, by Edgar Allan Poe: unless you have the complete Poe, you may not have this; *Ramaccini's Daughter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne: one of his finest tales, and the first appearance of a science fic-

tion theme which has rarely been handled as well since. *Hans Schnap's Spy-Glass*, by Erckmann-Chatrian: a tale which I have often seen referred to but never have encountered before this. *The Chronic Argonauts*, by H. G. Wells: the original fiction version of what became *The Time Machine* (earlier, Wells had written it as a speculative article), never before published in the U.S.A., and very hard to obtain elsewhere. *The Begum's Fortune*, by Jules Verne: a chapter from a lesser-known novel of the old master, which is a short story in itself: *Frank Reade, Jr.'s, Air Wonder Fights the Klamath Indians*, by Luis P. Senarens as "Noname": another sampling of material I've heard about, but never had a chance to dip into.

The above occupy the first 129 pages of this collection, and they are well-filled pages. The rest of the book contains selections which you are more likely to have encountered before.

The Whisperer in Darkness, by H. P. Lovecraft: one of his best science fiction themes — a wonderful story — which is one of the most painful to read. It is more heavily larded with "had I but knowns" in various guises; with gratuitous assurances to the reader as to how horrible, etc., everything is; with avoidances on the one hand and "over-descriptions of the almost-seen" on the other, than any other major story in the Lovecraft canon. Too good to miss, and too bad to satisfy!

The rest of the stories, *The Man Who Saw the Future*, by Edmond Hamilton; *Prowler of the Wastelands*, by Earl Vincent; *Skeleton Men of Juniter*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs; *Doodad*, by Ray Bradbury; *The Cosmic Express*, by Jack Williamson; *Castaway*, by Arthur C. Clarke, and

One Way to Mars, by Robert Bloch, I either have not read, or having read, have no objections to. In fact, having read most of Harl Vincent's stories, and found the majority pretty awful,

it's a pleasure to see here one of his very fine ones.

If I hadn't received a free review copy, this book is one I'd take the trouble to buy. RAWL

The Street

by ROBERT W. LOWNDES

He thought he knew the city thoroughly,
And never needed maps to find his way;
Yet here beyond this rusted gateway lay
A street whose very name was mystery.
He could not read the letters on the sign;
They seemed to blur before his eyes and change,
And, as he watched, three men, in no way
 strange,
Walked by him, through the gate, in single line.
He saw them clearly in the fogless night;
He saw their shadows, heard their footsteps beat;
Yet, as he followed down the curious street,
Abruptly there was no one else in sight.
Afterwards he often came this way,
But never could he find the street by day.

From *New Annals of Arkya*, copyright 1945 by Robert W. Lowndes.

The Scourge Of B'Moth

by Bertram Russell

THE FIRST inkling that I had of the gigantic abomination that was soon to smother the world with its saprophytic obscenity in 192—, was obtained almost by accident.

My friend Dr. Prendergast, a gentleman eminent in his own particular branch of medicine, which included all sorts of brain specializations, operations, trephining, and so on, called me personally by telephone from his own residence late one night.

It struck me as surprising that he should not have had his secretary or nurse call me during office hours. I was not in error when I thought his mission an urgent one.

"Randall," he said to me, "I've never seen the like of this in all my years of experience, and I am pretty sure you never did in yours either."

"A mental case?" I asked with quickening interest.

"Yes. And more. It's got me

Fog and dampness, and unclean whispers in his
mind . . .

almost beaten to a standstill. I confess I'm pretty nearly stumped. I've gone over him thoroughly — X-rayed him and so on — but still I can't find any evidence whatever of organic disturbance."

"Well — can't it be a functional neurosis?" I asked in some surprise.

"If it is, I never saw another like it. The fellow seems to be actually *possessed*. He acts without knowing why he does so. I've given him a rough psychoanalysis, but it reveals nothing more than the repressions and inhibitions that every average person has. His unconscious contents show absolute ignorance of the awful obsession by which his waking hours are beset."

"There must be a reason for it," I said. "If a man has an obsession, there are unconscious associations to exorcise it with. It can only be the symbol for something else . . ."

"The symbol for something else. You're right there. But if I can't find out what this something else really is, and pretty soon at that, this patient is going to join his Master before long."

"His Master?" I queried, surprised at what I thought to be a Biblical allusion by Prendergast.

"Yes. Whoever that is. He talks about nothing else. This Master represents the thing that

is dominating him, stretching out its tentacles from the darkest depths of unfathomable abysses to strangle the desire to live within him. He says now that he is eager to die, and you don't need me to tell you what that means in the neurotic."

"I'll come over immediately," I said.

"German-American Hospital, ward 3, psychiatric," he said giving me the final instructions.

I HURRIEDLY donned my clothes — I had been reading Goethe in a dressing-gown before retiring — and unlocking the garage I started the coupe. Soon I was on my way to the hospital where my friend had arranged to meet me.

The night was exceptionally dark, and a thin, clammy drizzle had commenced to fall — not a cold rain, but a viscid, penetrating darkness like the breath of some Stygian fury. The car was quite closed, yet I felt the clammy thrill of it inside. I even noticed that the instrument board was covered with drops of fluid and the wheel became wet and unruly under my touch. I almost allowed it to slip out of my hands as the car rounded a sharp curve. I jammed the brakes on. The wheels skidded on the slithery ground. I had been just in time to prevent the coupe from careening over the edge, where a dark abyss fell away

from the road as if a giant had scooped a track through the heart of the hills.

A cold perspiration broke out all over me. I could hardly drive. My hair tingled at the roots. For it had seemed to me at that moment that *hands other than my own had wrenched that wheel from mine in a demonic lust of murderous intent*. Try as I would, I could not throw off the thought that a nameless fetidity had me in its control at that moment, and was even now within the car bent upon my destruction.

Was I, a psychiatrist of years' standing, versed in all the processes that produce disturbance in the human brain, skilled, in treatment — was I falling headlong powerless to help myself, into the depths? I fought the very suggestion, but to little avail. The dark night, the wild and mountainous nature of the country (where the hospital had been erected for the sake of quietness and seclusion) combined to produce a feeling of unknown forces, malignant in their fury toward man and the sons of man, that I could not dismiss.

But more than all was the nauseating, overpowering effect of that clammy fog, like a breath of evil that rode with me, enveloping me in its chill blast. I laughed aloud at the notion of a presence other than my own in the car, and the

laugh, muffled by the turgid breath that surrounded me, echoed in weird accents from the rear of the car. My voice had sounded strange like the laugh of an actor who is not interested in his role. I even turned to the rear of coupe, as if expecting to see the presence there, but my darting eyes revealed nothing.

"This must cease," I told myself, as I turned on the heater. It may have been the comforting warmth produced, or it may have been an unconscious assurance that the laws of nature still continued to function — my turning the switch had proved this. I did not know what was the true cause, but as the heat within the car increased, my spirits warmed, too, and I found myself driving with my accustomed care, and utterly without the meaningless fears that had overwhelmed me so few minutes ago but so many ages since, as it seemed to me.

THE AIR INSIDE the car was clear now; the drops of moisture had disappeared from the instrument board, and my hand grasped the steering-wheel with its accustomed firmness. It was becoming uncomfortably hot, and at last I switched off the heater. As the air cooled, my spirits cooled, too. I felt the same senseless

dread stealing over me again, and I watched with intense anxiety for the reappearance of those drops of moisture on the dashboard. Seeming to materialize from nothingness, they came.

The air within the car thickened, and again caressed me with its voluptuous and sickly folds. As the lights of the hospital appeared upon the crest of a ridge ahead of me, I began to tell myself that I *had* to turn on the heater once more. But my will was not equal to the act. I drove on in a kind of dream, blithely careless of anything in the world. The steering wheel responded easily to my touch; it even seemed to spring from under my hand as I swerved around treacherous corners where chasms thousands of feet deep yawned below, missing the edge by a scant few inches.

I drove on, heedless, in the dense opacity. I could see nothing now. But the wheel seemed to have a magic of its own. I felt the car bumping and undulating like a roller coaster. My head crashed against the roof. The springs bent with an ominous crack. I felt the wheels slithering sideways as though someone were pulling them from their course, and finally, with a terrific crash, the coupe turned over and would have capsized completely if the pillars that marked the entrance

to the hospital had not partly prevented it from falling.

Dr. Prendergast and two of his associates opened the door and dragged me out half-dazed, into the night.

"What's wrong, Randall?" said Prendergast anxiously.

I stood there, stupidly, hardly knowing what answer to make.

"We've been watching you for some time. We saw your lights five miles away. You've been driving like a man in a dream. Look!"

I turned, and saw the tracks of the car in the lawns before me. I had left the driveway and traveled across the hills and valleys of the landscape garden. A chill dread came over me. I could see the tracks of the car clear out into the road beyond. I could even see the headlights of another car traveling along the same road that I had come — miles away. In the soft air there was no moisture; above, the stars twinkled along their age-old courses. The fog had lifted!

With a new fear clutching at my heart's vitals, I spoke to them.

"The fog — the rain — it made it impossible for me to see. I couldn't find the road half of the time I never saw such a night!"

"Fog? Rain? There's been no fog and no rain. Why, we

could see your headlights for miles. The night is as clear as a crystal"

"But there *was* fog, right up to a minute ago. The car was wet with it, I tell you."

As I spoke, I reached my hand to the windshield, intending to prove my assertion. In amazement, I looked at it. There was no trace of moisture — none at all! I stooped to the grass, and buried my hand in it. There was no rain upon it. It was even a little dried up, and I could see it had not been watered for some time. Again I pierced the night. There was not a cloud in the air anywhere, not a bank of fog between the hospital and the city.

"What you need is a stimulant. Come inside, and I'll give you one," said Dr. Prendergast, taking me cautiously by the arm

Fearful for my own sanity, I stumblingly entered the hospital. As I took one last look around, I thought I saw a thin whisp of sickly vapor curling around the green lawn before me, like a wraith of yellow venom, and while my distraught nerves tingled in every fiber, there came to me the muffled echo of a mocking laugh.

Half walking, half sliding, I was taken into the hospital.

2

"FEEL BETTER?" asked Dr. Prendergast, when I had gulped

ed the stimulant that he had handed to me.

In the cheerful air of the doctor's private office I felt my fears to be of the flimsiest. I even felt constrained to laugh aloud at them. But the memory of that ride was not so easily effaced. However, I made light of my experience, saying that I had had but little sleep, and night-driving did not agree with me. Dr. Prendergast gave me a curious look from his slanted eyes but said nothing.

We left the office, and taking the elevator, were soon in ward 3—the ward where the mental cases were confined. A nurse met us with a chart in her hands.

"How is the patient?" asked my colleague, with more than usual interest.

"Still delirious, Doctor," answered the trim little nurse.

"We shall take a look at him," he remarked, walking toward a cot in a far corner of the room. "There he is," he added, to me.

Before us lay a pallid-looking figure. His black hair was tousled, as though he had been tearing at it with his fingers. His eyes were surrounded by deep, hollow circles that made him look like a grim precursor of death itself. He was talking inarticulately, and holding a disjointed conversation with some imaginary creature that he alone saw.

As I sat beside him, he burst

into a frenzied laugh. Lifting his emaciated hand toward me, he pointed a skinny finger into my face.

"Hal hal Here's another one to rob the Master. You came too late — the Master saw to that. Hal hal"

"Quiet yourself," said Dr. Prendergast in a soothing voice. "You are going to get well, but you must not excite yourself in this fashion."

"Going to get well? Oh no, I'm not- The Master saw to that. I'm going soon, very soon. I'm going to join the Master. Deep down — where he waits for the faithful. That's where I'm going. Why should I want to live? Why should I wait around when there is work to be done?"

"What sort of work?" I inquired, hoping to relieve the compression within him by allowing him to talk.

"The work of the jungle. The work of the deep. That's what must be done. The time approaches. Millions and millions will help. And I shall soon be there. Hal hal You came too late. The Master saw to that. On the storm he rides. His breath is the breath of the fog. In the rain, he comes to the earth. He stayed you tonight. Eh? Didn't he?"

In spite of myself, I was troubled. Who was this Master who rode on the wings of the storm, and whose breath was

the fog? I asked myself how this lunatic in his ravings knew of my experience that night. He was gasping for breath. His efforts had exerted him unduly, and apparently he was about to expire.

The nurse brought a glass of water, which he gulped greedily. "Water," he said. "Oceans of it. That's what the Master likes. That's the way to reach him. Into the caves where the blue light flames it goes, down, down beneath the bodies of dead men, deep — deep. The Master! Ah! B'Moth! Master — I come!"

His head fell back upon the pillow, and with a rapt expression in his eyes he died. I stood perplexed. This could be no ordinary case of hallucination. The man had seemed, as Dr. Prendergast said, bewitched, possessed. I left the cot, in company with my friend.

Suddenly he clutched my arm feverishly. "Look," he cried. "Look!"

I turned in the direction in which he was pointing. The glass of water was still clutched in the patient's hand. The fluid glowed with a lambent bluish radiance. It flittered across the features of the dead man, which became greenish under its influence. His lips twisted into a snarl under the light, and the sharp fangs of his long canine teeth pricked through his closed mouth.

And the water in the glass was bubbling — bubbling as though it boiled; and there before my eyes the fluid slowly fell, until the glass was empty of all save the bluish glow that surrounded it, and not only it, but the bed, the linen, the dead man, and *ourselves!*

3

THE PRESSURE of my professional duties served to drive the matter from my attention for several days, but it was rudely brought to my mind in a manner as strange as can well be conceived.

I had been carelessly scanning the newspaper, when my eyes were arrested and riveted by a small and apparently unimportant notice that was sandwiched in between the account of a big alimony case and the raid upon some bootleggers. Had the editor known the full import of his copy, he would have blazoned the thing in block type, and put out a special edition of his sheet. I quote the notice verbatim:

ARICA, PERU, May 8—A strange case was brought to the attention of police here today. Alonzo Sigardus, a West Indian, was haled before Justice Cordero on a charge of attempted suicide. He was seen to dive into the ocean near Point Locasta by Captain Jenks, the lookout at the Marine Exchange station there.

Jenks says he rushed to the as-

sistance of the man, thinking he had intended to go swimming and did not know of the treacherous undertow at the point. When he arrived, however, he saw at a glance that it was a case of attempted suicide, for Sigardus could not swim, and was merely floundering around helplessly in the depths.

Captain Jenks promptly dived into the water at the place known to sightseers as Devil's Cauldron, and after a frantic struggle with the maelstrom, during which Sigardus did his best to drown the two of them, was able to rescue the man.

Instead of thanks, however, Sigardus struck Jenks brutally upon the face, crying: "The curse of B'Moth upon you! It was the call of the Master. What right have you to interfere? I went to join B'Moth, and now you have dragged me back again. When the time comes, you shall suffer."

The incident has aroused widespread local interest, because it is said that the Devil's Cauldron upon foggy days is the meeting-place of spirits of the deep. Legend has it that upon such days, and during the rainy season, the Monster of the Pool arises from the deep water to claim his own.

Obviously, the superstitious Sigardus thought he had been called by the spirit of the Cauldron. It is interesting to note that a thick haze commenced to overcloud the pool after Sigardus had been rescued. Until this time, the sun had been shining with great brilliance.

There is much excitement among the native population here, and talk is common that the rescue bodes no good. Serious disturbances have arisen in several inland villages, and police and military have united forces to protect the white population against whom the attacks seem chiefly to have been directed.

APPARENTLY, the incident

had only obtained recognition in the press because of the legends which were connected with the Devil's Cauldron, and which were thought to be of interest to the outside world; and because of the attempted uprisings. But to me, the insertion of that single and apparently incomplete word gave a sinister and terrible inflection to the whole paragraph.

Who, or what, was B-Moth? It must be the same "Master" to whom the dying man had appealed in the German-American Hospital. And there was no shadow of doubt that it was a duplication of the same occurrence, unconnected with it except by the subtle influence of the B'Moth.

I felt my hair begin to tingle when I read the news item again and came to note about the fog that overlay the pool after Sigardus had uttered his curse. This was too close a similarity to admit of any such explanation as mere coincidence. As a psychiatrist it interested me greatly, and I even began to feel in some obscure way that it was my duty to investigate the whole business. Perhaps (and far-fetched as the idea may seem, I thought of it in all seriousness) — perhaps the very sanity of the world was at stake.

As I laid the paper aside and prepared to drive to my office,

I felt again the oppressive weight of that unspeakable thing that I was slowly coming to dread, so that I could not drive alone in fog or through a rain-storm (though I dared tell no one of this phobia) I felt—Good God, how I felt! — the weight of that pollution. I seemed to be drawn unresistingly into the maw of this corruption. I stood transfixed, my teeth chattering, unable to lift a hand, watching the place where I felt absolutely certain the thing was. And then into my jangled consciousness came the imperative ringing of the telephone bell.

I moved slowly toward the instrument, my eyes fixed irresistibly upon the other side of the room. Mechanically I lifted the receiver.

A voice came as though from a great distance. "Is that Dr. Randall? Please come across to the German-American Hospital immediately. Dr. Prendergast has gone insane!"

WHEN I arrived at the hospital where my friend was being treated, the condition of my mind was far from equable. That the same calamity which I dreaded had actually befallen my friend came as no slight shock. But I strove to compose myself as I entered the building. If my suspicions were correct, there was work to be done,

hard work and plenty of it — if this foul thing was to be foiled in its malign purposes.

I found Dr. Prendergast in a comfortable private room — the best in the place. He was sleeping quietly when I entered. But before I had been there more than a few minutes, he awoke, and looking at me, shook hands cordially. He began to speak, in a natural, softly modulated voice.

"Randall, there's something strange and uncanny about this business. Ever since that affair when I had to call you into consultation, I have had an odd feeling that all is not well. I've actually been harassed by morbid phobias — if that's what they are. I never dreamed of a psychosis coming to me. The more I think about the matter, the more I have come to believe that you and I are marked out as martyrs to the cause, though why, or how, I can not even begin to understand."

"You seem all right now, and certainly you never gave me the impression of being neurotic."

"That's just it. I ought to be the very last person to crack, but though I am as sane as it is possible for a man to be at this time, in a few minutes that Thing may have me in its clutch, and I shall be a raving lunatic. It's funny, Randall, to be able to analyze your own particular

form of lunacy — if such it is. I can remember quite well what happened to me last night. It is much more real than the usual dream associations. And I dread its return more profoundly because of this. If this is lunacy, it is a form never before seen. But I don't think it is lunacy at all."

"Tell me about it," I urged. "Perhaps two minds can do what one can not."

"There's not much to tell. I had been reading Freud until a late hour last night — his last book, you know. Thoughts that were assuredly not born of earth came to me. I began to feel an immense distaste for life — the life that we live today, I mean. I thought of the days of the jungle, and those primordial memories that lie dormant within every man came back to me. The artificiality of the world with its commercial systems, its codes of conduct, its gigantic material things, that after all have done little else besides making life harder to live, and shorter — all these appeared as the flimsiest futility.

"IT SEEMED to me that man was not made to live in this fashion. I thought that the giant primeval forest with its fierce combat of man against man and beast against beast was the fitting habitat of life. I thought of those monsters of the deep, glimpsed occasionally by

passing vessels — huge beyond the conception of man. Once life had been lived altogether on a gigantic scale like that. I felt, I can't say just why, a deep kinship, an affinity with those bloated colossi of the sea — the carrion that feed upon the bodies of the dead. They seemed to me to represent the farthest step that could be taken in a retrogressive direction — back from civilization, you see—back from the painfully acquired things that we count so valuable.

"And — here is the strange part — it seemed to me that this thought did not come wholly from myself. It was almost as if something had whispered into my ear that abomination of regression. I felt that at the same moment, not I alone, but thousands and thousands, rather millions, were dreaming of the time when the cycle should have been completed. We always learned that things are cyclical, you know. Rome rose; was great; fell. So on with the other civilizations, all of them. So undoubtedly will be our own great civilization. It will be the mythical end of the world that seers have predicted for centuries. There will be no starry cataclysm, but a return of all life to the jungle.

"Competent authorities state that if something is not done to stop this approaching catastrophe, we shall be literally eaten

alive by insects — ants, for instance. There seems to be plenty of scientific basis for this suggestion. But who has thought of the awful possibilities that may arise if those unknown creatures, bloated to foul enormity, shall in concerted array overrun the civilized world?"

"It's an awful thought, but there's no foundation for it," I said.

"I'm not so sure that there's no basis for it. I've had a feeling, lately, that there is a tremendous movement under way that has as its sole object the overthrow of civilization and re-establishment of the life of the jungle.

"And here's what appears to be the reason for selecting us. We can exercise an enormous control over the minds of men; you agree? This unspeakable Thing has seized upon us, is trying to enmesh us in its net, to enlist us in the cause, because with the influence that we can exert we should be enormously valuable. Do you follow? We are to be apostles of this creed!"

"What an appalling idea! I'd rather be dead," I said with a shudder.

"Dead! Who knows what might happen to you then? You might join the Master . . ."

"You, too!" I cried.

A SPASM OF fear crossed my friend's face as the full import

of his words bore in upon him. His muscles were twisted in an agony of internal strife, as he fought the influence.

"They haven't got me yet, Randall. But they are after me! I'll fight them. I pray that my lucid intervals may be frequent enough to enable me to unravel this foul mystery. Good God! — I'm in a cold sweat all over. Tremors!"

I started across the room to the table, and pouring a glass of water, handed it to my friend.

He shuddered convulsively, and recoiled from it as from a living horror.

"Away!" he shouted. "Take that contagion away! It's after me! It's alive! I won't drink it. It means madness!"

With a frantic effort he dashed the glass and its contents upon the floor.

I stared at my friend, aghast. Suddenly a thought came to me — a recollection of that night when a certain glass of water had glowed with iridescent fire; when, through the baneful influence of the fog, my own mind had skirted the borderland of lunacy. I began to understand.

My colleague was calming himself again. Presently he spoke.

"It's going to be a fight for me," he said. "But I'll battle to the last gasp. Your part will be to watch, and, if possible,

learn more of this awful Thing that menaces the sanity of the world. There must be some way to destroy it."

"How shall I start?" I muttered in puzzled bewilderment. I had only the slightest of clues to work upon. The newspaper cutting did little more than confirm what I already suspected.

"Your key is the word of the Master: 'B'Moth'. Don't forget — *B'Moth*. What it means, I can't say. But the word has been ringing in my ears for days. That's the Master — that's the name of this cankerous rottenness that you must destroy!"

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I LEFT THE hospital in a daze. How was I to destroy this Thing? I was already half in its clutches. I could do little but flounder in the dark. If, as Dr. Prendergast and that dead man had asserted, there were millions of followers, they kept their doings secret. "B'Moth" — the word was like a voice from another world — without meaning.

I thought, and thought, in an agony of apprehension. I knew not where to turn for information. I spent hours in my library, greatly to the detriment of my practice. I exhausted most of the books of mythology and of anthropology, but still I could find nothing that seemed

to have any bearing upon the matter.

One day, when I was going through an ancient volume of Kane's *Magic and the Black Arts*, bound with a heavy bronze clasp, and closed with lock and key, I came upon the following:

There be many who revere the Devourer, though few have seen the full stature of this great power. It is a vision fraught with eldritch horror, and much sought by wizards of early times. One, Johannes of Madgeburg, wise in the lore of the ages, hath met success greatly in his efforts. He asserteth that the Devourer liveth in the Deep, and is not to be reached by any means, yet he hath been able to feel his breath and know his will. The secret is in a vaporous effluvium. For the Devourer hath power to manifest himself where there is moisture. His breath is the fog and the rain. Wherefore, many do account water the elemental, and do worship it in divers ways.

This Johannes hath told in his book of medicine how he did conjure from a heavy vapor in his efforts the very Essence itself upon occasion. The phosphorous light of dead things did swell into a great brightness and fill the chamber, and withal came the spirit of the Devourer. And Johannes hath learned that he liveth in the deepest Ocean, where he awaiteth only a time auspicious for his return to earth. Many there be who joyfully believe the time approacheth yet Johannes saith that many centuries shall pass ere the Master returneth to claim his own.

Much astonishment hath one remark which he made produced. He saith that the Devourer is a familiar of every man and every woman. He liveth eternally in the Inner Man.

He reacheth forth from the Deep, and the Inner Man doth hear. All-seeing is his eye, all-hearing his ear. None can destroy him, for he is intrinsic in all men. In times of evil and lust, of war and strife, of man against man, and brother against brother, the Devourer liveth lustily in men. His ways are the ways of the Deep. There be saints and mystics who believe they have exorcized the Devourer, but in them, also, he liveth. In the depths of the waters, and in the souls of men, he sleepeth, and one day will awaken to take his own.

I FINISHED the ancient manuscript with a start. Though the Thing was called by another name, I could not doubt that the reference was to the same. I sought eagerly for the book of medicine that had been written by Johannes of Madgeburg, and after hunting all day I at last unearthed a copy in an antique shop. It was torn, and badly discolored, the writing in Latin, and in many places hard to decipher, but I found some thing of great interest to me.

Johannes, after describing his attempts to communicate with the Devourer, told of his success. He had learned the secret from a philosopher of a still earlier day. I quote, translating as well as I am able:

Being of a mind to discover the Ultimate, I sought diligently into the works of historians, and wise men of all ages. In my studies, I chanced upon a manuscript written by one, Joachim of Cannes. He had gathered a wealth of lore from men

of every clime. He said the name of the Devourer was Behemoth, which, indeed, is translated into "he who devours the souls of men". This monster is of great antiquity, and was well perceived by the ancients.

In the Hebrew Bible, he is mentioned. The seer Job makes much in speaking of him. All men are agreed that his size is as great beyond a man's as a man is great beyond the stature of a toad. He has the power to reproduce for ever, and after the flood times he was driven into the ocean, where he lives among the dead in the caves of crawling things.

But the power of his thoughts is over all men. He has divers powers of manifestation. Through water, and through mist, is he felt, and his thoughts are the thoughts of the toad and the snake, wherefore these reptiles are accounted sacred by many. There is but one spell that can be cast to conjure him back to the ocean, and the parts of it . . .

I DROPPED the manuscript with disappointment. In my extremity I was prepared to work any spell, if it would, as Johannes said, be successful in exorcising this dread Thing. And the careless handling of the ages had torn from the manuscript the page where the spell was formulated.

But now at least I had a clue to the Thing. I snatched up a complete Bible, and read avidly all the references to the Behemoth in the Old Testament and Apocrypha. I also consulted other works described as Old Testament Apocrypha, and found more references. There were many, but they were all agreed

upon the devouring quality of the destroyer, and all affirmed that he would some day return from the depths to claim his own.

Winslow's encyclopedia, which I consulted last, placed as a footnote to an earlier article, a paragraph stating that in many countries an organized worship of the Behemoth was practiced under various disguises, and that the cult was more prevalent near the equator, and among savage peoples. The learned historian suggested that the animal might be a hippopotamus!

How little did he know of the power about which he wrote! But I gleaned from this short note another interesting fact. As I reflected upon it, it seemed a very natural corollary of the proposition. The worship was more prevalent in tropical countries, and among the least advanced of humanity. The reason was obvious: they were nearer the jungle, both physically and mentally. I also suspected that it would be common among the dwellers of such lands near the ocean. The isolated incident of the Devil's Cauldron substantiated this belief.

With some satisfaction in my heart I left the metaphysical library when I had finished my search for the day. As I crossed the sidewalk to the parking-station where I had left

my car, I stood still in my tracks, gazing with horror upon the sight that met my eyes.

A dirty, tousled figure was dashing along the street, pursued by two policemen. He was clad in the lightest of garments that looked more like underwear or sleeping-clothes than anything else. He stumbled occasionally, but some instinct seemed to enable him to keep out of the grasp of his pursuers. He was carrying something which he balanced with great dexterity. I looked closely as he approached me and saw that it was a tank filled with water, and inside the tank was a collection of lizards, water-snakes, etc. And as he approached me, eluding his pursuers by a hair, I saw that this man in pajamas was Dr. Prendergast.

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BUT WHAT A changed Dr. Prendergast! His professional manner had disappeared. His usually benign face was twisted in a snarl of fury, and his teeth gnashed and champed like a jungle animal lusting for blood.

The policeman explained that they had caught him robbing a nearby aquarium, and refused to believe his story that he had been *ordered* to take the reptiles that he still carried with such a jealous care.

My professional card and rep-

utation, however, satisfied the officers; and, since the doctor refused to part with his treasure, saying he would die first, I finally agreed to pay for the stolen property, and the owner accepting my proposal, my friend was permitted to retain his prize.

Throughout the journey back to the hospital he babbled unceasingly about things I could barely understand. Hundreds of times he repeated the words "Master" and "B'Moth." He asserted that he had done the Master's bidding in stealing the reptiles, and called upon the Thing to reward him when the time came.

I questioned him a hundred times as to his reasons for stealing the tank and its contents, but a cunning look came into his eyes, and try as I would, I could not elicit from him any reason for his act. He clung to his statement that he had but done the bidding of the Master and that he was to be rewarded for it.

His look held suspicion and distrust for me. Like that other poor creature, he sensed in me an enemy of his Master. At times I caught him leering at me with a murderous expression in his red-rimmed eyes, and I confess that I felt not wholly comfortable, there alone in a closed car, with this madman who had been my friend.

It was with something ap-

proaching a sigh of relief that I drove in at the broad entrance to the hospital where he was still confined. He showed no disposition to resist the attendants who came to take him to his room, and seemed satisfied in the belief that he had accomplished his end.

When he entered his room, he carefully placed the tank and its contents upon a table in the center, and apparently gave it no further attention. I left him, then, and went to the office of the hospital.

The report was the same as usual. Dr. Prendergast had been sleeping well, eating, but his moments of lucidity were fewer and farther apart. Even then, he seemed to brood under the weight of the obsession that was dominating him.

He had developed a mania for collecting insects of all kinds. He had begged the authorities of the hospital to procure for him jams and other sweets, which, instead of eating, he placed in appropriate places about his room, and waited for the vermin that are bound to be attracted by the preserves.

His room was overrun with flies, ants, and mice; but instead of destroying them, he used every effort to encourage them. He had constructed boxes that acted as traps, and which the superintendent of the hospital informed us were

filled to overflowing with various sorts of insects. He had one box filled with grasshoppers, another with ants, a third with flies, and so on.

This occupation was something that I could not understand. What was his purpose — for I felt reasonably sure there was a purpose — in making this collection? I could understand the tank of reptiles after my reading of Johannes. They were undoubtedly symbolic of the Master himself. Perhaps he had caught them in the belief that they were kin of that Thing. But the insects and vermin — these I could not explain at all.

I WAS NOT to remain in darkness for long, however. On returning to the room, I stood outside for a moment, and peered through the aperture in the door that is frequently used for observation purposes in mental cases. The simulated indifference of the doctor had passed away, and, under the impression that he was now alone, he was working furiously.

At first I could not understand his occupation, but soon it flashed upon me what his object was. In his hand was a box. It was filled with flies, in a semi-stupor; the man was slowly sprinkling handfuls of the pests out of the box where they lay too weak to move. He then fed them carefully to the

creatures within the tank! I noticed at his hand other empty cages, and supposed that they had been filled with ants and grasshoppers. He fed the last of the flies to a water-snake and with great contentment replaced the boxes in a neat pile upon a shelf.

Grasping the handle of the door firmly, I entered the room.

His face a mask of fury, my friend whirled upon me with a champing of teeth. Like a cornered tiger about to strike, he crouched against the wall, but, with a smile, I seated myself upon a chair. Seeing this, and that I did not intend to interfere with his pets, he relaxed somewhat, and sat upon the bed. His face was cast in a moody pattern. His brow was knit in a frown as if pondering something.

Slowly the tensivity of his body relaxed, his face assumed the normal lines of good humor that I had so often seen upon it, and he looked up.

"By heaven, Randall! If what I think has happened, I am better off dead!" he said.

"No matter what has happened, I am pleased to see that you are still fighting," I answered.

"Yes, but the effort is almost too much. I wanted to kill you when you came in. You had better watch me, for I am liable to do it the next time. A feeling came over me that you

were in my way, or rather, in the way of that hideous Thing that has me in its power, and that you ought to be killed and fed to the sharks."

"Why fed to the sharks?" I asked with much interest.

"Because they are of the sea — devour each other. Every living thing they devour, if it is not of the sea, is another soul added to their power — to the power of B'Moth."

"Extraordinary!" I ejaculated in amazement.

"That's the word. But I know — I can't say *how* I know, but I feel it just the same — that the object of this business is to place an overwhelming power in the hands of the filthy abominations at the bottom of the sea, and in the depths of the jungle."

"You're right there. I've discovered that. Is that why you have been feeding those land creatures to the reptiles in that tank?"

He followed my pointing finger, and shrank from his pets in abject terror. "Did I collect those things?" he asked quaveringly.

"Yes. Can't you remember it?"

"I have some idea of laying out bait for insects, under the impress of a will stronger than my own, but why I have those snakes, I don't know."

"You stole them this afternoon," I said quietly.

"Stole them, eh? I can't remember that at all. This thing is getting a pretty tight grip upon me. I'm afraid that unless we can do something, I am finished. I can't remember what I've been up to at all for the past few days. I'm losing this fight."

"We'll pull you through. My idea is that you obtained the reptiles in order to feed the other things to them, and thus increase the proportion of souls for the deep. I can't explain it any better, but you can follow, perhaps. You wanted to help this ghastly business by strengthening the mental influence of the Master and his kind." I shuddered as I found myself using the word "Master" so easily and familiarly.

"No doubt you're right. I can't imagine any other reason for such an act. The very sight of these green, slimy things chills me now. I can't think of it without a shudder."

"There's one thing I want to ask you."

"Go ahead," said my friend without much enthusiasm.

"Are there any particular times when this thing comes to you?"

"No particular times, but on certain occasions. By Jove, I ought to have thought of it before! It's when there is fog outside that I experience the drowsy feeling that precedes these attacks."

I COULD NOT repress a cry when I heard this. I remembered my own experience in the automobile that night, now so long ago, as it seemed. The drowsy feeling had come to me with its stupefying accompaniment when the fog had rolled in through the cracks of the car. It had disappeared when I lighted the heater. An idea came to me — a possible means of saving my friend in his extremity.

I rang the bell for an attendant.

"Lay a fire, and light it immediately!" I ordered.

The attendant looked at me in amazement. The day was a hot one, and my order must have seemed as crazy as the sick man's ant-collecting.

"Hurry," I snapped, as I saw the look that I was coming to know spreading across the face of the patient.

The attendant flew like the wind, realizing that the matter must be important. While I anxiously watched the struggle that was, I know, going on in the mind of my friend, the fire was laid. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. His jaw was gritted in fierce resolve, as he watched the attendant futilely attempting to ignite the kindling.

There was no time to waste. I dashed out of the room and into the dispensary. My eyes found a bottle of alcohol.

Snatching this from the hand of a startled intern, I ran back to the room as fast as my legs would carry me.

Dr. Prendergast was writhing upon the bed and clawing frantically at the tenuous wisps of gray mist that seemed to be stretching out their sinuous tentacles to draw him into their clutch. They seemed actually imbued with life, as I am convinced they were. He lay upon the bed as though trying to hide from the relentless purpose of this Thing that strove to blast his sanity.

The alcohol flew from my hand, the match ignited it, and the flames licked greedily at the kindling. The thin wisps of mist writhed and twisted, and gradually vanished as the fire gained volume and roared a menace to this Thing from the depths.

Upon the bed lay the racked form of my colleague, shuddering and weak, but smiling — and in his right mind!

7

"WE'VE WON!" he cried jubilantly, grasping my hand.

"Rather say 'we are winning'." I smiled, pleased at the success of my experiment. "Don't let that fire out, no matter how hot it becomes in here, or you'll soon find out that this business isn't finished. Look! Can't you

see it out there on the lawn? That mist — twisting and curling like a thwarted Thing? It's alive, I'll swear. If you let that fire out, or open this window, it'll be after us again with a vengeance! Don't forget — keep that fire burning night and day! It's life or death now!"

I left immediately, for I had much to do. I hurriedly drove to Brocklebank, a small town in the country. Stopping the car before the portals of a large residence, I rang the bell. The servant, who knew me well, ushered me without introduction into the library of my old friend, Geoffrey d'Arlancourt, a student of antiquities and strange beliefs. I wondered that I had not thought of him before.

I broached the subject on my mind without further delay: "What do you know about the worship of the Behemoth, Jeff?"

He wrinkled his brows quizzically. "The Behemoth? — well, a little. It's apparently a mythical monstrosity that has been the focus of various forms of Satanism, pseudo-religion, and downright butchery."

I told him about my investigations into the writings of the mediaeval philosophers, and what I had learned about the Thing.

"In that case you probably know more than I can tell you," he said with a smile, "except

that you, perhaps, have never seen the worship actually practiced."

"No, indeed," I said. "That's what I came to see you about."

"Well, I have. The name apparently has innumerable variations, but always the main idea is the same. I have sometimes been tempted to think that there may be some such thing in reality. You know, of course, that the so-called savage peoples are given to all forms of voodooism, animism, and the like. We say, in our sophistication, that this is only because they have not yet learned a true sense of values. I am often inclined to think that it is because they are freer in their subjective processes than we are. They think that a tree has power for good and ill. We say it is not possible, and yet Bose, for instance, to mention only one of the great scientists, has conclusively proved that a plant has feeling of joy and pain, and actually cries aloud when hurt. These people, being more readily receptive to influences that we deem spiritual (because we can not otherwise comprehend them), are naturally those among whom such a worship might find a firm foothold. The nearer we go to life in its bald reality, the nearer we come to the worship of the Behemoth and other allied things."

"Do you mean to imply that

this worship is beneficial?" I questioned, in some surprise.

"I won't say that, but I will say that it serves a very definite purpose in filling a gap that we of civilized times have left void. But to return: If you want to find examples of Behemoth worship, look for them among the lower strata of society — in the hot countries, among the aboriginals of New Zealand, and so on. It was in such places that I found innumerable instances of it on my recent cruise. I confess that I was greatly surprised at the prevalence of the thing. It is spreading at an alarming rate."

"Tell me the details," I said breathlessly. Apparently I was on the trail at last.

"SUBSTANTIALLY, the worship is the same everywhere, and its very similarity gives it the appearance of representing a widespread truth. It appears to be related to a real, a living thing. The great idea back of it is that the time is rapidly approaching when the jungle will return to its own, when civilization will be wiped out, and the law of power will again prevail.

"Apparently this Behemoth has never been seen, but it can be felt. I almost believe I have felt it myself. Incantations are made in a language absolutely unintelligible to anybody; the medicine men themselves have

told me that they can not apprehend the meaning except through the medium of traditional translations. And here is another strange thing: though I have seen this worship in New Guinea and Peru, in Malaysia and Finland, the syllables have always a similarity. The incantations are seemingly the same. They sound like unintelligible gibberish, more like the language of apes or the roar of the sea lion than speech, yet they are pronounced nearly alike by these widely separated races. Randall — *they mean something!*"

Again I felt my flesh beginning to creep at the thought of the tremendous power with which I had to deal.

"What is the central feature of this worship?"

"There are two: a mystic union with the Behemoth, which means a pledge to aid in the restoration of the jungle and the overthrow of civilization; and secondly, the objective side, which includes the sacrifice of unbelievers — usually to members of the reptilian species, though I have seen children given to jaguars, which were kept the sacred symbols."

"I suppose there are even places here where this abomination holds sway," I suggested with a flutter of anxiety.

"Not a doubt of it. The thing is apparently gaining currency everywhere; why not here? I

could almost tell you where to look to find the worship practised."

I then told d'Arlancourt everything that had led me to make these inquiries. When I had finished, his face was tense and fearful.

"This is monstrous! I can scarcely believe it. If it is true, we must take steps immediately to root out this cancerous putridity at its very heart. Wait!"

He walked across to the bookcase and selected a volume. For some minutes he read in silence. Then he spoke:

"There appear to be some secret orders founded upon this worship. The names will, in all probability, be changed, but they may be similar enough for us to spot them. One is the Macrocosm. Another is the order of Phemaut, a very ancient one, originating in Egyptian times, and worshipping as its symbol the hippopotamus. If my memory serves me aright, the word for hippopotamus in the language of the third dynasty was Pe-he-maut: very similar to Behemoth, you see.

"Now, we shall ascertain if there are any relics of this business in Twentieth Century America."

He lifted the telephone receiver, and a chill dread came over me. I felt again that overwhelming fear that presaged the coming of the Thing.

D'Arlancourt was speaking.

"Secret service? Give me Ellery. Tell him it is d'Arlancourt. Yes, please. Hello — yes, this is Jeff. I want to know whether you have any reports on secret societies that bear a name like Phemaut, B'Moth or Behemoth — a name something similar to that." He listened for a while. "What — good heavens! We'll be over, right away."

He turned to me, and his face was gray. "He says there are known to be societies throughout the world going by the name Phemaut, and others with similar names, and that, after raiding them, the police have discovered bones — human bones, charred, and in many cases, buried. He says these societies have been suspected of incendiarism, dynamiting, and the like. Randall, you have put your finger upon the worst sore the human race has yet to cauterize!"

8

WE FOUND Ellery caressing a beautiful police dog, a pet which he had trained from puppyhood.

D'Arlancourt rapidly described to the secret service man what I had already told him. Ellery received the information, at first with a quizzical smile, but, under the accumulation of evidence that we were able to present, his face took on a grave mien. He called his secretary,

and instructed him to obtain a certain address.

"And send a telegram to the secret service departments of every civilized country, in code," he added. "Inquire if there have been any signs of an attempt — what shall I say?" he stopped, looking helplessly at us.

"Ask if there have been any overt attempts that appear to be directed by secret societies to rehabilitate the life of primitive times at the present day," I put in suggestively.

"But they'll think me crazy. They won't know what I mean."

"They'll know well enough if they have run into anything like what we are dealing with here," said d'Arlancourt quickly. "If they don't, they will only think the cable has been garbled in transmission."

"All right, put in something like that. Ask particularly if they have had any trouble from groups of people who worship any animal, or any reptile, particularly one that resembles a hippopotamus."

"Very well, sir," said the secretary with a slight smirk.

"That's all," snapped Ellery.

We left the office together, and drove to the meeting-place that the detective wished us to visit. Ugly rumors had been associated with it, and there was some probability that we should find what we sought there.

The night was fast falling, as we approached the hall. It was in a squalid and miserable section of the city. We parked the car some distance away, and mingling with the motley throng that sought admission, we entered the building, and seated ourselves near the rear door.

The place was almost filled, and very soon after our entry the lights commenced to dim. They dwindled to mere dots of green flame, and there arose a chorus of meaningless babble like the chatter of apes in the forests of the Amazon. This was evidently the greeting extended to the high priest of Behemoth, who was now entering.

He was clothed in a shining green robe that was apparently made from the skin of some monster of the deep. Like decaying fish, it glowed a bluish green, and surrounded the repulsive features of a mask that he wore with a fiendish, unnatural light. Slowly he mounted the steps to the rostrum. I saw that there was before him a tank which glowed with that lambent blue fire that I had seen in the glass when the insane man had died in the German-American Hospital.

I found it impossible to repress a shudder. The place was almost dark, and except for the priest on the rostrum, we could see nothing but the tiny points of green that indicated the colored electric lights.

THERE APPEARED to be no ceremonial or ritual in connection with the business. Everybody did as he pleased, but always there was that wild jargon, that reminded me of the forest. At my left was a woman, with pendulous jowl, and huge teeth projecting from between thick lips. Her shouts almost rent my eardrums.

As the affair went forward, the crowd became ecstatic, and many threw themselves in transports upon the floor, tearing their clothes away from their bodies and dancing wildly in the darkness. Many carried tame serpents which they lovingly caressed; others had tiny monkeys which they kissed affectionately. Men and women alike threw themselves upon each other in a frenzy of mad abandon. I saw a Malay struggling in the arms of a white woman, and heard their shouts of ecstasy. I saw others sinking teeth deep into the arms, the legs, the shoulders of those nearest to them in an insane fury of primeval ferocity. There was a beautiful girl, her body stripped naked, lying in the embrace of a bronze figure, drinking in with passionate abandon the kisses he showered upon her. Apes flitted hither and thither among the crazed throng, receiving homage wherever they passed. Serpents writhed, their coils encircling the throats of the devotees. And the shouting rose to a bedlam.

The air was becoming thicker every minute. I could not understand it at first, but soon it was clear to me. I had seen that heavy greenish vapor before. It was the breath of that hellish atrocity that these deluded wretches worshipped. It seemed to overhang the whole hall, enveloping all in its clammy folds. I felt the sickly touch of it, and writhed as though in the grip of some loathsome Thing. My companions sat there with drawn faces, their muscles tensed in an effort to resist the awful spectacle.

The cries rapidly blended themselves into a rhythmical shouting. Into my dazed senses there was borne the sound of a single phrase: "B'Moth . . . Master!" It was repeated a thousand times as the heavy pall closed in upon us thicker and thicker.

The man sitting at my side spoke to me in roar of joy. "The Master is almost ready," he shouted above the din. "A few more days and the world will fell his power." He beat his brows, and cried in ecstasy, "Come . . . B'Moth . . . Master come!" I nodded in pretended agreement, and he went on with his shouting.

A woman threw her arms about me and whispered foul things into my ear. Suddenly the attention of the crowd was centered upon the priest at the rostrum. He had uncovered the tank of water upon the plat-

form, and to my horror I saw there, with jaws agape, a huge crocodile. It seemed clothed with the sulfurous glow like everything else.

Into the pandemonium of noise there was injected a new and startling sound — a shriek, shrill and piercing in its power — the voice of a woman in mortal terror! I strained my eyes through the heavy vapor, and saw—good God!—it was a woman that this monstrous priest held aloft over the tank! His purpose was plain. He intended to feed her to the thing in the water.

I stared in horror, paralyzed. I could not lift an arm to save her! At my side there roared a deafening blast. A spurt of flame pierced the night. Ellery had fired his automatic. In fascinated horror I saw the tank splinter as the bullet pierced it. Water poured forth, iridescent and phosphorescent, covering the devotees. The crocodile slithered to the floor, and floundered among those nearest him. His red-smeared jaws champed furiously at the arms and legs of the people in the front seats, while Ellery fired and fired.

At last he found his mark. The crocodile writhed in mortal agony, flapped his tail, striking half a dozen men who were bowing before him, and died. The priest dropped the girl, and commenced to run. In his haste, the mask which covered his

face became dislodged, and fell to the ground.

I stared in stark horror at the lust-distorted visage that was revealed to me.

9

THE GIRL came dashing up the aisle and disappeared into the street. We were in a dangerous position. The frenzied mob turned upon us with murderous lust, and scratching, punching and panting we were borne to the floor. Again Ellery's gun spat lead and flame, and the crowd edged away from him. In the lull, we dashed for the door and escaped across the street into the car.

We saw the girl standing in the street. Hastily telling her to get into the car, we drove back to the office of the detective.

When we arrived, we found the secretary in great distress. The police dog that Ellery loved so much appeared to have been taken suddenly ill. The detective excused himself, and left the room.

We heard him outside, calling the dog. There was a patter of canine feet, then a snarling growl. We heard a heavy body thud to the ground, and a cry of pain. Darting to the door, we saw a sight that sickened us.

Ellery lay upon the floor, and blood was streaming from his

throat. He was dead before we reached him. And as the dog — half wolf, wholly wild — stood there, growling at us, the unspeakable enmity of those eyes, touched with a devilish light, bespoke the fiend, the devourer, Behemoth. Around him there curled a thin wisp of yellow vapor.

D'Arlancourt picked up Ellery's revolver from the table and fired at the brute. The dog fell dead, and as he fell — was it true, or did my distraught nerves belie my senses? — I thought I heard an ominous rumble from the dark recesses of the room, as the vapor floated out of the window and vanished.

10

IT DID NOT need the statement of the girl whom we had brought with us to convince us that the day was near when the whole horde of the jungle would attempt to overrun civilization.

The telegrams without exception told of a series of attempts to the same end. Several of them in fact employed the word "B'Moth," showing clearly that the incidents were all connected by some strong central purpose.

But we were still in the dark, and ignorant of the time and place of the attempt. The thing

was expected to raise its head in Argentina, Africa, India, and a dozen other countries. How could we hope to deal with them all at the same time?

What we did do, however, was to cable to the police forces of the entire world, telling them to watch diligently and be on their guard for any invasion from the jungle or from the sea. Probably our message sounded fantastic to them, but we made it as convincing as possible.

This done, we set about for a means to protect our own people from the menace which we felt was imminent. After some thought, I found a possible means to forestall these hideous things. It was a daring one, and risky; not to be attempted without the full consent of Dr. Prendergast.

I telephoned the hospital, and asked if he was there. I learned that he was, and that the hospital authorities had succeeded in rekindling the fire which a careless attendant had allowed to die some time previously. The doctor was rapidly recovering. I requested the office to connect me with him, and he replied cheerily enough.

He was quite unable to furnish me with any information of the sort that I desired. Finally, I made the proposal that I had in mind. It was the only way that offered even a possible solution of the problem.

"Are you willing to do some-

thing for the cause of humanity?" I asked.

"What is it that you want me to do?" he asked rather anxiously. He had already been in dire peril, and I could well believe that he feared the Thing more than anything else in the world.

"I want you to let that fire die out again for a few minutes," I said slowly and distinctly.

"Good heavens! I can't do that. You know what it would mean."

"Yes, I know. And because the matter is so important, I ask you to do this. We will be outside, and ready to light it again, so you will not be powerless."

"Why do you want me to do this?"

"There is a chance that you may be able to tell us when this invasion will occur. If it is to be soon, all the followers of the Master will have to know it. You must try to remember all that occurs while the fire is out. Will you do this?"

"It's a lot — but I'll do it," he said resolutely.

WE HURRIED over to the hospital, and watched through the aperture of the door while Dr. Prendergast allowed the fire to flicker slowly to death. His face grayed with fear as the last sparks died down and the ashes cooled. I could see, even from that distance, the great drops of perspiration breaking

out upon his brow, as the insidious influence stole over him. The room darkened, and the tendrils of vapor slowly gathered about him. He lay upon the bed like one dead, but, by his breathing, I could see that he was still alive.

I saw the distorted ferocity that I had come to know so well these last few days spread over his regular features. I heard the grunts that came from him as from some wild animal. He snarled and spat in a very fury of savage lust, as he became metamorphosed from the doctor into the demon. No longer did he lie motionless, but he moved excitedly about, and began to talk in a language meaningless to me. He seemed to be holding a lengthy conversation; but at last he struggled, as though attempting to throw off some fearful oppression, and I knew that it was time to relight the fire. I entered the room, resolutely shunning the dampness that sought to envelop me with its coils. I soon had a bright fire burning, and slowly the good doctor revived.

"Do you remember anything?" I questioned, anxiously.

"Yes, I remember all. I can scarcely credit it. There will be an invasion from the ocean with the next full moon. Monsters will attempt to blot out the whole civilized world, and the followers of B'Moth are expected to help in the destruction.

I myself have been ordered to help."

"You are sure that it is to be with the next full moon?" I interjected earnestly.

"Yes. The next full moon — when is that?"

I consulted the calendar. "It is a week from today," I said. "Have you any idea where the attempt will commence?" I suggested,

"None whatever, but I suppose it will be somewhere in this country," he said dejectedly.

"Well, we will be on our guard everywhere," I said.

D'Arlancourt and I left the hospital, and hurrying to the secret service offices, we again sent several telegrams, and also radio messages to ships at sea. We requested everyone to keep a sharp watch for any accumulation of monsters both at sea and on land.

We spent some days of enforced idleness, and were becoming hopeless of being able to prevent the awful catastrophe that was about to overwhelm us. We had had great difficulty in influencing the war department in the matter, but finally they had consented to order the forts in various parts of the country to fire upon anything extraordinary belonging to the animal world. That was as far as they would go, and the order was given more out

of courtesy than anything else. And who can blame them? They were used to fighting armies, and not spirits.

AS THE DAY of full moon approached, the armed forces of a world united for the sake of civilization were mustered and anxious. Then came the message. It was from the steamer *Malolana*, plying between San Francisco and Hawaii. The broadcast that we had sent out a few days earlier had been effective. The captain reported that he had seen a school of monstrous things swimming rapidly toward the mainland, directly upon the steamer routes forming the great circle to Honolulu. There were thousands of them, like enormous blanket-fish, huge beyond comparison, almost as large as his own ship!

During the day, other messages came in from various vessels on the great circle route to Hawaii, and they all mentioned this huge array of Things. The Presidio at San Francisco was immediately notified, and we caught a fast airplane that took us to Chicago, and Denver, and so to Mills Field.

It was the night of the full moon when we arrived at San Francisco. We motored hastily to the Presidio. Activity was everywhere. The enormous disappearing guns that can shoot a shell thirty miles were ready to hurl destruction at the invad-

ing hordes from the deep. The scout planes hovered aloft to signal the approach of the invaders. Telescopes were trained anxiously upon the starlit Pacific. Fort Miley was a scene of activity also. The naval stations at Bremerton and San Diego were watching for any change of course on the part of the hordes from the ocean. And with the full moon, they came! The ocean for miles was a seething, swirling mass of horrid immensity. Green bodies sucked their way through the smooth water. The swish of their swimming was plainly audible to the watchers on the lookouts of the Presidio.

"Fire!" went forth the order, and the range guns belched a message of death. Again and again shells were hurled into the center of the bloated creatures. Still they came on, slowly, relentlessly, ceaselessly.

The air was a deafening hell of shrieks and blasts as the guns did their work. The ocean was red with the blood of the Things. And still they came on!

Mines were exploded outside the Golden Gate — mines placed there to blow up battleships. But still the things came on!

Airplanes dropped bomb after bomb upon the horde, and came back for more ammunition, but still the advance continued! A dense fog that I had

learned to dread was enveloping the sea — the breath of Behemoth himself, coming to general his forces!

Time after time the guns spoke. The very hills shook. From Fort Miley there came thunder, too. Battleships anchored in Navy Row steamed to the mouth of the Golden Gate and hurled broadside after broadside at the monsters. They were slowing up now, and their number was greatly reduced, but still the advance was not halted.

At last came frantic word from the coast guard station at the beach that they were landing. The panic-stricken people were leaving their homes, to see them crushed beneath the weight of the hordes like so much matchwood. The guns laid down a concentrated barrage upon the landing-place of the monsters and tore the beach to shreds.

Under the glare of the huge searchlights I saw streams of sluggish red, where the awful carnage went on; but at last they turned back — back to the sea whence they came. The fog lifted — had the Master met his fate? — and the filthy things floundered heavily away from the shore, jostling the carcasses of thousands of their dead as they did so. Still the thunder of the guns followed them, far, far out to sea, to the extreme limit

of their range; and when it was all over we sank limp to the ground, speechless before the peril that had just confronted us.

OF COURSE, the details were never made public, but on the following day we received cablegrams from all parts of the world telling of a concerted attempt to regain power by these creatures of a dreadful past.

From India came messages telling of invasions by hordes of tigers and mammoth elephants; from Africa of lions, all the wild life of the forest; from Burma stories of huge apes that crushed the life out of men; from South America, of all the reptilian life of the Amazonian forests massed in relentless array. But thanks to our knowledge of their purpose, the attempts were frustrated.

The stories of incendiarism, of course, could not be kept out of the press. The dynamiting of the McAuliffe Building in New York is common property. The butchery of Professor Atkinson in his laboratory of experimental hygiene is well known. Throughout the civilized world, the police forces were hard put to it to cope with the threatened overthrow of civilization.

But civilization triumphed, and the forces of destruction were greatly reduced, although not destroyed; they never can be destroyed. Dr. Prendergast

laughs at the fog now, and the
rain has no terrors for me.

Was my surmise correct when

those Things turned tail and
made again for the open sea? Is
B'Moth dead? I wonder!



the cauldron

WHILE IT IS still too early to give you any final returns, we can report that the letters and ballots we have received from you thus far on the first issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES have approved the continuance of this department, as well as approving the publication of excerpts from your letters, as we do in MAGAZINE OF HORROR. In order to spare repetition that might become monotonous, however, we shall not repeat personal notes on an author more than once a year, except where we have something new and of interest to relate about him or her. And, in some instances, we shall be unable to give you any data at all. Also, rather than listing authors' appearances in MOH here every time, we shall list the entire contents of back issues elsewhere in the magazine, and merely note that the author has appeared in MOH. Authors in the present issue who have been seen there are Edward D. Hoch, John Brunner, and Seabury Quinn.

JOHN BRUNNER does not write very

many short stories, being known chiefly for novels, one of the most recent being *The Squares of the City*, published by Ballantine Books last year (#U6035, 75c). A handsome, cultured young Englishman, he had had 25 books published when we saw him two years ago, and now may be very close to his ambition of having a number of published books equal to his age, if he has not already reached this goal. We ran a short story of his in MAGAZINE OF HORROR last year, April, 1965, and a very interesting short article, *A Twenty-First View of Sex*, appears in the July 1966 issue of our sister publication, REAL LIFE GUIDE. (Copies are available postpaid @ 50c each from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Ave, New York, N. Y. 10029.)

TERRY CARR has had a number of stories in the MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, one of them reprinted in F&SF's annual "Best" volume, and two given honorable mention by Judith Merrill in a recent vol-

ume in her continuing series of year's best science fiction. He is presently an editor at Ace books.

TED WHITE has had fiction in *AMAZING STORIES* and *GAMMA*, and, in collaboration with Terry Carr, a story in *If* and a novel from Monarch Books. His own novel, *Warlord of Cor*, appears in Ace Double Book F177, along with *Star Wasps*, by Robert Moore Williams. He, too, is currently an editor with Ace.

BETRAM RUSSELL is not to be confused with BETRAND, LORD RUSSELL, the world-famous scientist and philosopher (although Lord Russell has written some imaginative fiction). About the present Russell we can relate only that this is one of two stories he had published back in 1928 and 1929 — the earlier one a three-part serial.

New Annals of Arkya was a pamphlet published by The Phantagraph Press, New York, 1945, under the aegis of DONALD A. WOLLHEIM, who graciously copyrighted it in the author's name, as he did with the preceding pamphlet, *Annals of Arkya*. Together they make up a series of a dozen verses which your editor had written over the course of a few years, in imitation of Lovecraft's *Fungi From Yuggoth*; there is a slight tie-in with two stories also imitating HPL, *The Abyss* and *The Leapers*.

PAUL ERNST first appeared in Science fiction magazines in the September 1930 issue of *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE* with a novelet that is still readable today, *Marooned Under The Sea*, even if it does (or perhaps because it does) contain a race of human beings living under the tyranny of intelligent fish creatures who have perfected water-filled helmets for land living. He also appeared in *AMAZING STORIES*, *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE TALES*, and *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, as well as the mystery/terror magazines of the 30's.

Robert Silverberg, whose letter was the first to reach us after SMS appeared, writes, "The magazine looks fine — a wanderer out of time, mysteriously produced in 1937 with a 1966 copyright date. That name! That logo! That yellow-and-black-and-red cover! Lovecraft, Bloch, Derleth and Quinn! For a moment I thought it was some unknown pulp of a bygone era . . . You've caught the effect gorgeously, and I suspect you'll have a loyal and passionate following. If Batman can come back, why not *WEIRD TALES* and *HORROR TALES*?"

Why not indeed? However, it would seem that you have fallen into the same error that Sam Mos-



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kowitz did in one of his introductions, and in his excellent book, *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction* (The World Publishing Company, 1965; \$6.00), where he refers to the old Popular Publications magazine as **HORROR TALES**. It wasn't; it was **HORROR STORIES**, initial issue dated January 1935; the slightly elder sister publication, **TERROR TALES**, came out in 1934, first issue dated September.

Edward D. Hoch, writing as a reader, says, "*The Lurking Fear* . . . Probably the best written story in the issue, but it perhaps belongs more in **MAGAZINE OF HORROR** than here. I know it's a fine line, but it seems to me to be more 'bizarre, frightening, gruesome' than 'unusual, eerie, strange'. . . . I find it impossible to rate Poe. The story and style are dated, but it (*The Tell-Tale Heart*) is still a classic."

It is, indeed, difficult to draw the line and at times you will very likely see stories here which you think could have gone just as well, or perhaps better, in **MAGAZINE OF HORROR** — and vice versa. However, we hope and expect to have a fair amount of content in each issue which indisputably belongs in **SMS**, and would not fit well into **MOH**.

Rosalia Bonanno writes, ". . . this magazine is amazingly like **WEIRD TALES**, and never was there a magazine like that — no funny, so-called witty or wise-cracking stories and no crudeness. Horror Magazine is crude, most of it, but you take authors like Clark Ashton Smith, Grege la Spina, Frank Belknap Long, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, etc., who wrote for **WEIRD TALES**, and then watch out! Cultured and masters of the eerie, no crude ghost tales, no jokes, no science fiction, please, either — that has

MISSING SCME COPIES OF MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#1, August 1963: *The Man With a Thousand Legs*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Thing of Beauty*, Wallace West; *The Yellow Sign*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Maze and the Monster*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, Ambrose Bierce; *Babylon: 70 M.*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Inexperienced Ghost*, H. G. Wells; *The Unbeliever*, Robert Silverberg; *Fidel Bassin*, W. J. Stamper; *The Last Dawn*, Frank Lillie Polock; *The Undying Head* Mark Twain.

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H. G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire*, Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslammer*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Electric Chair*, George Waight; *The Other One*, Jerry L. Keane; *The Charmer*, Archie Binns; *Clarissa*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, Rudyard Kipling.

#3, February 1964: *The Seeds of Death*, David H. Keller; *The Seeking Thing*, Janet Hirsch; *A Vision of Judgment*, H. G. Wells; *The Place of the Pythons*, Arthur J. Burks; *Jean Bouchon*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Door*, Rachel Cosgrove Payes; *One Summer Night*, Ambrose Bierce; *Luella Miller*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *They That Wait*, H. S. W. Chibbett; *The Repairer of Reputations*, Robert W. Chambers.

#4, May 1964: Out of print.

ORDER FROM PAGE 125

its own outlet in other magazines. . . . Poe is too ancient and too long, and not written in modern language."

Humor and science fiction are proscribed at once by our reader, who finds SMS so reminiscent of WEIRD TALES — and yet WEIRD TALES, in its later days, ran many "humorous" ghost stories, etc., by Robert Bloch and others. We ourselves did not care for this approach, either, although genuine humor (rather than wise-cracking) is another matter, we think. However, the old WEIRD TALES did very de-

finitely run a great deal of science fiction, most of it *weird-scientific*, as Farnsworth Wright used to call it, although some was straight interplanetary adventure, no more weird than the tales of Edgar Rice Burroughs. (Perhaps we should have underlined that word "more" because Burroughs could be most decidedly eerie at times, as in his city of corpse-creatures in *Lost on Venus*.)

We do not propose to offer you stories which, it seems to us, could just as well appear in ANALOG. We know that some of you may consider the Carr/White and Brunner tales

MISSING ANY COPIES OF MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#5, September 1964: Cassius, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Prout; *The Beautiful Suft*, H. G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

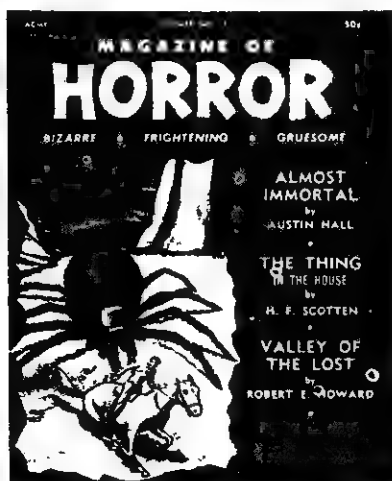
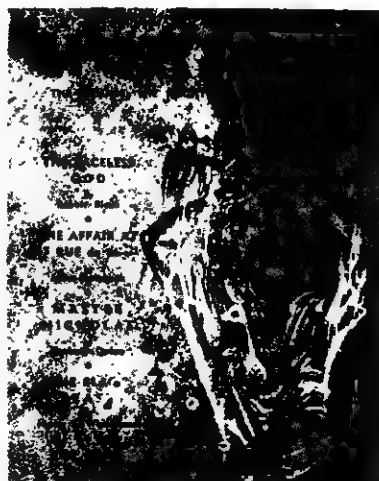
#6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fraction*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

#7, January 1965: *The Thing From — Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Phantom Farm-*

house, Seabury Quinn; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way With Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E. B. Marriott-Watson; *The Shuttered Room*, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

#8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R. H. D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Passeur*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack*, Reynold Junker; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings.

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Stain of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H. G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.



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in this issue science fiction. It seems to us that they are primarily mystery stories with a touch of that element. However, the editor is not here to please himself, so we shall put the question up to you, the readers. Would you have us sternly banish even so much as the suspicion of science fiction from our pages? Or would you like us to cover the entire range of the strange, which would at times include what we might consider borderline and some of you, definite science fiction? Your desires, as the saying goes, shall be our command as soon as we have enough votes in so that we can be sure of how the majority of the voting readers feel about it.

"I was very glad," writes *David Allison*, "that all the stories in **STARTLING MYSTERY** do not have 'supernatural' solutions to the mystery. While I love weird tales, and remember the old magazine with that title, it rather spoils things to know in advance that every story in an issue is going to have some sort of psychic horror or supernatural or cosmic manifestation behind the events in it. Sure, I want a number of real weird stories in each issue, but if I know that some will have natural explanations, then it makes it more enjoyable — so long as you don't give it away in your blurbs! So my vote is to keep the contents mixed up — unusual, eerie, strange. Every story in the first issue fitted somewhere in the meanings of those three words, and that is what I like to see."

We do indeed want to give you a mixture of the elements you mention in each issue and agree that all of the same thing — whether that sameness be the "supernatural" element, or the natural explanation for the seemingly supernatural — would make **SMS** very monotonous very soon. How does this issue's balance strike you, readers? **RAWL**

MISSING SOME COPIES OF MAGAZINE OF HORROR?

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hau Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Greya la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Muncing, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memoirs of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredit*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

ORDER FROM PAGE 125



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YOUR LETTERS, as we indicated above, have been most helpful. We wish that we could thank you all personally, but the best we can do is to express our appreciation here, and ask you to continue writing your views to us if you find this issue interesting enough to comment upon.

Robert A. W. Lowndes




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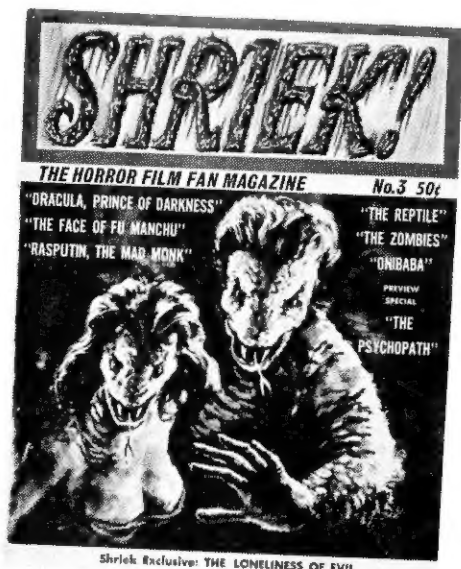
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